

spare Rib

NO. 41: 30p

P 523 / 344

*Short story by
Amiya Rao*

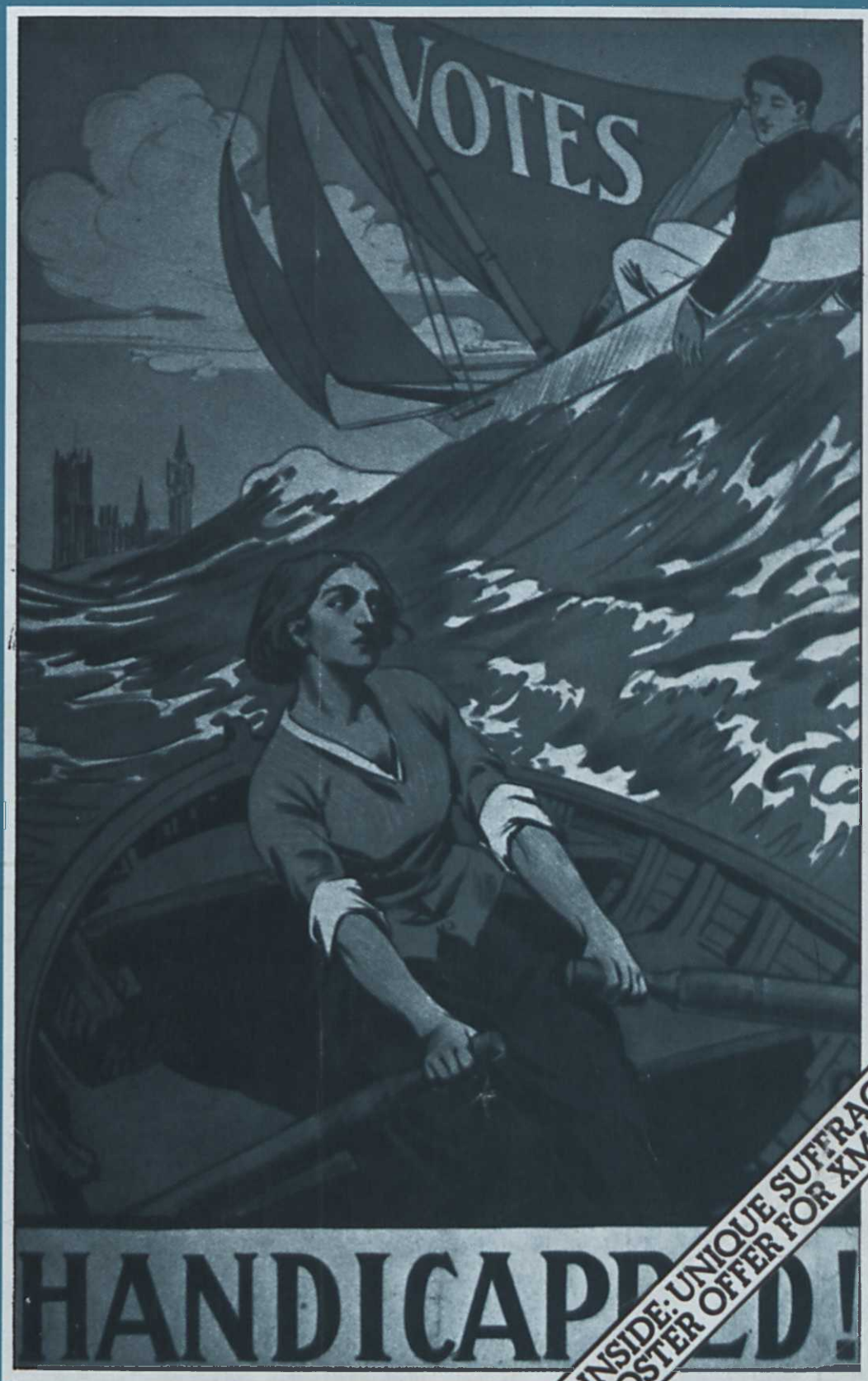
*Working as a
probation
officer*

*The
Lesbian Body
reviewed*

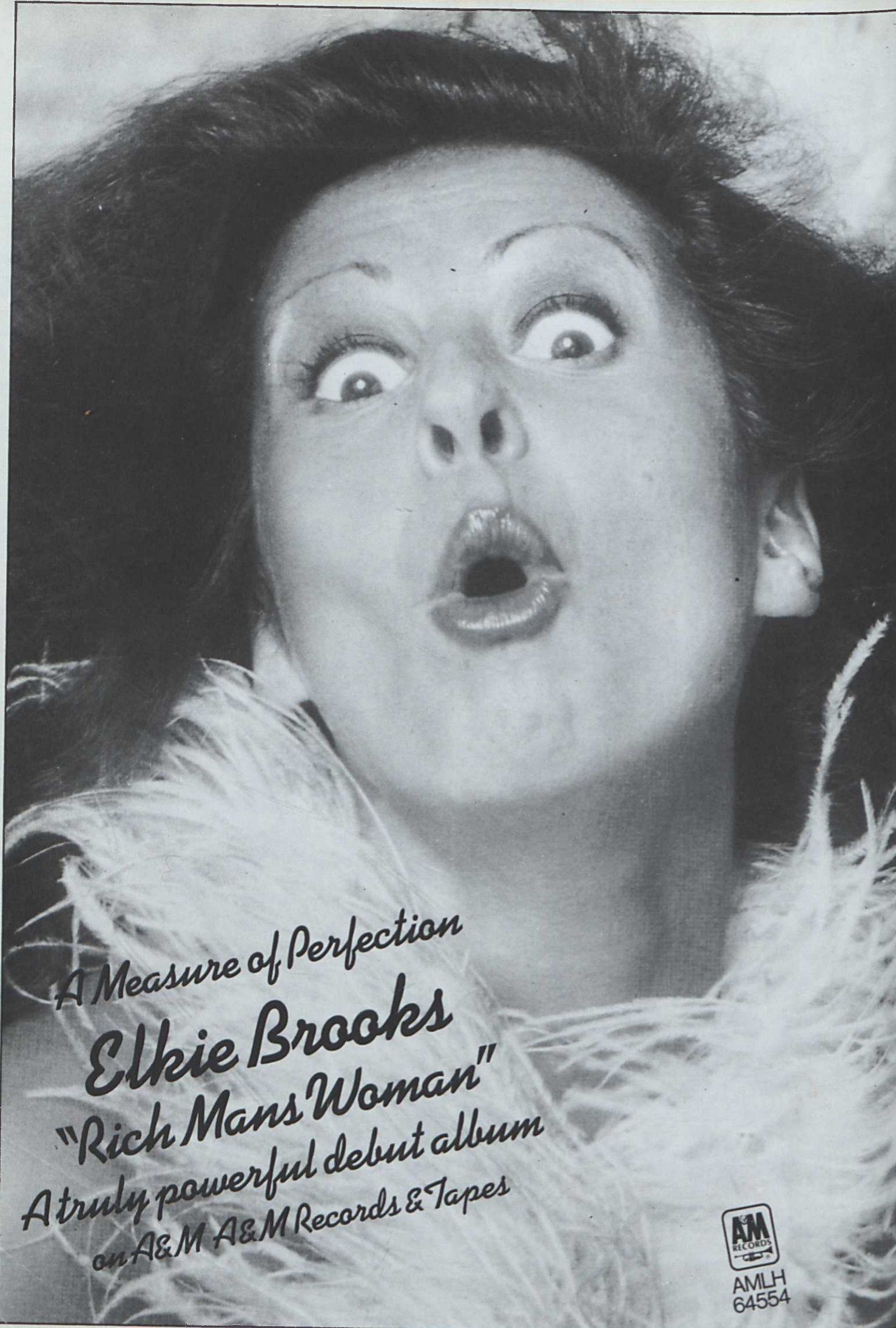
*Armagh:
a playgroup
called
freedom*

*A new
pregnancy
test?*

*Unpublished
Suffrage
posters*



INSIDE: UNIQUE SUFFRAGE
POSTER OFFER FOR XMAS!



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"Rich Mans' Woman"
A truly powerful debut album
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- Cover** Suffrage poster, 20x30", published by Artists Suffrage League, G.B.
- Letters** 4
- Shortlist** 6 Meetings, centres, services and pamphlets
- Editorial** 8 Racism and Sexism
- Arts** 9 Suffrage Posters Paula Harper looks at the campaigning images of women used by the suffrage movement on newly-discovered posters
- Feature** 14 Buchi Emecheta A novelist from Nigeria talks to Amrit Wilson about the way traditions shape women's lives in Nigeria and the pressures facing them in London. Smita Caulker reviews Buchi Emecheta's novels
- News** 17 A Playgroup called "Freedom" A group of women from an estate in Armagh, Northern Ireland, describe their fight for a playgroup
A New Pregnancy Test? Jill Rakusen explains how you may be able to test for pregnancy *before* you've missed a period
"I don't talk to bitches who want to make love without having children" – Italian doctor. Rosalind Carne on problems facing the current Italian campaigns on abortion and contraception
Reports: Equal Pay and the £6 pay policy. National Abortion Campaign benefit makes £600. Women and Work, photo-exhibition opens in Hackney, East London. International Conference of Eminent Women to be held in South Africa?
- Odds and Sods** 29 Wisty Hoyland answers inquiries for information and advice
- Education** 30 Women's Studies: success and failure Jill Liddington describes what she learnt from teaching women's studies; why her class judged their first term a success and their second a relative failure
- Poetry** 33 Poems by Michelene Wandor, Alison Fell and Michele Roberts
- Work** 34 Probation Officer Jean McCrindle recalls her time as a probation officer in the 1960's and reveals the hidden mechanics of the job
- Reviews** 38 Books: Sally Alexander on Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen*, and Sophie Dick on Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*
Film: Margaret Walters on *Nashville*
Exhibition: Rosie Parker on Mary Beale, a 17th century painter
Children's Books: Children's Rights Workshop on three books for older children
- Fiction** 42 Uma died last night . . . a short story by Amiya Rao

Spare Rib is produced collectively by the following people: Rose Ades, Alison Fell, Sue Hobbs, Wisty Hoyland, Susan Lambert, Laura Margolis, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Jane Prince, Marsha Rowe, Ann Scott, Eleanor Stephens

spare
Rib

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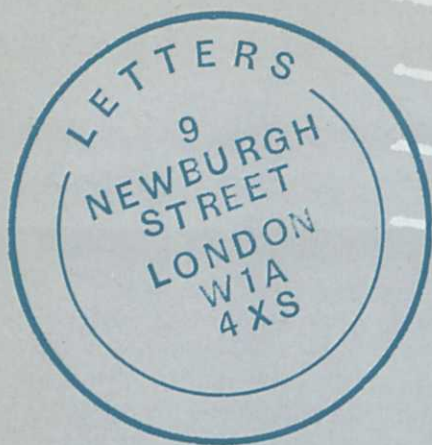
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ISSUE No.42 PUBLICATION DATE DECEMBER 3 1975
Distributors: MOORE HARNESS, 31 CORSICA STREET, LONDON N5.



*Indicates that letters have been cut.

Limited Choice

* Dear *Spare Rib*,

I am in total agreement with the views expressed by Maggie Moore (*Spare Rib* 39) regarding the continued necessity for safe, legal abortion despite the existence of freely available contraceptives.

Six months ago I became pregnant while using the cap and was lucky to be "granted the favour" of a NHS abortion after a great deal of humiliation. I have since been told that, in fact, owing to the position of my uterus, the cap was unsuitable; two attempts at taking the Pill have resulted in unpleasant side effects which I am not prepared to meekly put up with; and because of a previous attack of salpingitis I have been refused an IUD. So, after two years of frustration and anxiety, I have been informed that I have "a problem". The solution offered me by a gynaecologist – to accept the fact and take a responsible attitude ie marriage – I reject completely: do all women immediately yearn for conception as soon as the register is signed? Unfortunately, the power of this man and the many more like him forbids the light dismissal of his ideas as merely "ludicrous".

I am now hoping that the progesterone only pill will meet my needs, but since this pill is less effective than the better known oestrogen-progesterone pill I may again find myself unwillingly pregnant and, even more unwillingly, at the mercy of male doctors and gynaecologists who, from my own experience, grant or refuse abortions on the basis of their good/bad moods at the time of examination.

My support for free abortion on demand and a genuine right to choose for all women is therefore unqualified.

Could I finally make a request? I have become increasingly interested in menstrual extraction or inter-ception and I feel this could play a very important role in the struggle for control of our own bodies. If you could possibly put me in touch with any women who have experience in using this method and who would be willing to pass on their knowledge I would be grateful.

Best wishes
Sarah Kirkham
Sheffield

Exercise in Trust "Offensive and Sexist"

Dear *Spare Rib*,

We in Newcastle Women's Liberation Group hope and trust that the 'Exercise in Trust' series is really finished. Ms Severson commented in the putative concluding instalment in your last issue – 38 – that she was getting it published because, "It seems to me it would be tremendously useful to women here struggling with the same bonds and forces." The opinions expressed at our last meeting bluntly contradict her bland assumption.

Our strongest objection was that the whole 'exercise' was conducted in a sensational way which merely trivialised Penny's pain, while treating her as a lurid spectacle. In contrast, Anne herself, only offered Penny gimmicky solutions from her ivory tower stance; one which we have come to expect and admire in psycho-analysts. [Psycho-analysis was roundly indicted in an excellent article by Margot Waddell in issue 36 which also strangely contained an 'exercise' instalment; as, "having more to do with adjustment and social conformity than with liberation and struggle."]

Moreover, we felt that the 'exercise' was dangerous because the abstract attitude engendered therein would tend to direct any unsure, young women in the process of 'coming out' to seek clinical advice from the same 'male dominated, authoritarian structure'; rather than into any action as mundane but essentially constructive, as talking it over with friends. We were concerned that the flagrancy exhibited, such as in the grotesque description of Penny's toilet paper penis, might have the unfortunate effect, no, not of corrupting innocent young minds, but of lamentably distorting lesbianism and reducing it to be a matter fit for general ridicule.

However, not only did Ms Severson display a derogatory, sexist attitude towards lesbian women, but her writing showed offensive prejudice in other directions such as her racist remark about the "big, black buck".

We will say in conclusion that we were astounded at the inconsistency your once well-admired magazine has sunk to in publishing such a slight 'exercise', the content of which hardly seemed to be conducive to ideals of liberation and release.

Yours in sisterhood,
Wendy Burkett

Anne Severson replies:

Dear *Spare Rib*,

When I re-read the correspondence between Patricia and myself I feel uncomfortable about a quality in my letters that sounds a bit pompous. Perhaps it's this quality that inspires the criticism of "ivory tower stance" and "abstract attitude". My apologies to those who were offended.

I don't think that what we were doing was much like conventional psycho-analysis, but I haven't had much contact with psycho-analysis in the recent past, and it may have developed considerably. I don't think I'm part of any "male dominated authoritarian structure" though – or that anyone would conclude so from reading our correspondence.

I think if Wendy Burkett re-reads the section on Patricia's date with the "big black buck", she'll see that we were working on stereotypes. Patricia is playing one off against another, a trap we all get stuck in. The two operating seem to be his belief that lesbians are women who just haven't met the man who could really turn them on versus her choice of a man who typifies a male sex object – however unconscious that choice was. Recognizing and identifying such stereotypes, or prejudices, is how you begin to clear them.

I tried to check my attitude towards lesbians by deciding if I would want to be one. I wouldn't mind being a happy one. I guess that's the whole point of our work. My belief is that the circumstances of anyone's life are less important than how they feel about their life. At first glance this may sound counter-revolutionary. But consider how it is working in Patricia's real life now. Last year she was anxious, self-doubting, self-hating. Her lesbianism was a source of shame and fear for her. When I saw her this summer she was secure, happy, upfront about her choices and about the fact that she had made the choices. She was taking responsibility for her own life. I think that's the only position much successful change can come from. Hatred and fear breed hatred and fear.

Finally, I find Patricia's writing dramatic, moving, enthralling – a "lurid spectacle"? How could it be except to one who was unsympathetic, or who thinks women should shut up about the disagreeable things.

Regards,
Anne Severson
London W11

Exercise in Trust Real Support

Dear *Spare Rib*,

I want just to say thank you for printing the letters from Anne and Penny, each month (Nos 35-38). They show me the kind of *real* support that I know exists but which can be so hard to find and give. Reading Anne's words is like listening to someone I feel very close to. Thanks and love
Lyndall
Lancaster

She's Myself

Dear *Spare Rib*,

I must tell you how marvellous your Penny/Anne letters have been for me. I have a similar link with a man as Penny with Anne. When the article started, I felt very dubious and uncertain about Penny – and I wanted Anne for myself – I could so see myself leaning on her. Penny's progression in her relationship with Anne continued more and more to match my own (it was uncanny) and I began to love her. She's myself – and now I feel how marvellous she is to talk with and listen with.

All love
Jenny M
London

Facing up to Death

* Dear *Spare Rib*,

Two and a half years ago I was diagnosed as having fairly advanced breast cancer and had malignant lymph nodes removed, and radiotherapy but no mastectomy presumably because the growth was too deep-seated and extensive for that to be of much use. I was treated at a hospital by a consultant and have found the experience traumatic largely because he refused to give me, or even my husband by himself, any information on the things which have happened to or been done to my body. The only person who has given me any information has been my own doctor. It would have been so much easier if someone had discussed my condition and facing up to death at a much earlier stage – and given me all the facts; practically everything I know is guesswork from remarks, articles, broadcasts, etc., and then direct questions to my GP.

I would dearly like to contact other people (a) to have some support, and (b) to make some impression on this inability of the medical profession to cope with the psychological effects of fatal or near fatal disease, even if it is only in the education of young doctors.

However, cancer is a debilitating disease and coping with a full-time job and a family doesn't leave me much spare energy – I doubt whether I could take the initiative but would try to support anything that started as a result of the article in *Spare Rib* no.37.
Yours
Gill Loveday
Orpington



Abortion Campaign Fears

* Dear Sisters,
I've written about ten letters so far, trying to be polite, theoretical and non-controversial, and torn them up. So I'll try being blunt instead.

What out for take-over bids. Remember the sad fate of the Anti-Internment League? It collapsed because its main (London) branch was taken over at a 'packed' meeting by a sectarian political group who then altered the AIL principles so that it became the Pro-IRA Provisionals League, Independent members and supporters left on principle; members of the other, unsuccessful, sectarian groups left out of pique. The AIL thus lost most of its membership and all of its credibility, and died. Internment, on the other hand, is alive and well.

National Abortion Campaign please take note. The packed meeting technique has been tried at least twice to date, and has each time failed only by a hairsbreadth - I'm referring to the proposed November march discussions. (Why is it that the orthodox - ie the authoritarian, male-dominated left seems to have no conception of political action apart from marches and mutual recruit-poaching?)

If the National Abortion Campaign is taken over and used as a front group by any political sect, no matter whether it's the Young Liberals or the Anglo-Albanian Friendship Society, we'll all lose: the Women's Movement will splinter, the press will have a field day, large numbers of enthusiastic and energetic people will become disillusioned and cynical, it'll take years to establish a credibly independent successor to the campaign, and, most important of all, SPUC, with its unholy alliance of Catholics and Calvinists, will be virtually unopposed.

Any attempt to use the Women's Movement or NAC as a means to any other political end must be watched for and defeated. Too many politically revolutionary movements have been destroyed in the recent past by factional in-fighting and cynical manipulation.
Griff Everett
Derbyshire

James White Bill
Dear Spare Rib,

With reference to Richard Wainwright MP in the abortion news section of *Spare Rib* no.39, Rugby's Labour MP, Bill Price, voted for the setting up of the Select Committee, but has told Rugby Women's Group that the only circumstances under which he would vote for White's Bill again would be if the Select Committee unanimously supported the Amendment Bill. Price's reason for previously voting for the Bill was apparently because he wanted a select committee set up to investigate any changes necessary in the 1967 Abortion Act, not to automatically support White's proposals.
Julie Galloway
Rugby

Mixed Relationships

* Dear Spare Rib,

I am a white woman in love with a black man, and recently I found out just how far my own countrymen are ready to destroy any such relationship.

I stayed at a hotel in Huntingdon in order to see him and wanted to book a further night. I could see that my room was marked as vacant on the bookings chart but the reception clerk told me that every room was taken.

I had never been treated this way before and the message took time to sink in. I went for a walk to think things over, and rang the hotel anonymously. I was told that there were vacancies but when I got through to the manager he told me that the reception clerk had been mistaken and that the only vacancy had to be held over "for the director".

When I asked whether my black boyfriend had anything to do with the situation, the manager said he could "honestly" say he had no complaint about my room.

Half an hour later I got a friend to ring up for accommodation: he was offered the choice of a room either with or without a bath.

All this makes me very bitter but at least I know where I stand. Does anyone else have my experiences? If so, I should like to hear from them, with the view to setting up some kind of group.

Solidarity, I realise, is everything: we must get respect and recognition, if not love, and we must get our detractors, black and white alike, to understand that mixed relationships are here to stay and growing in number.

Yours in urgency
Nicki Brading
Leicester

Sex Education

* Dear Sisters,

After reading the article in *Spare Rib* No 38 about sex education, I would like to suggest that *Spare Rib* itself did a bit of educating. I think it would help many women not as fortunate as the girl concerned.

I am always saddened by the ignorance of women towards their own bodies, especially masturbation and the attainment of the orgasm. An article on the physiology of those would be helpful especially if it dispelled some of the myths, like the one about some women never being able to have orgasm, about it not being necessary for the female sex 'whose pleasure is in the giving, and in childbearing' - quote my doctor, a woman!

A few quick questions around five of my friends (all married with years of sex on the score card) revealed that none of them had ever had sexual satisfaction other than psychological, and though most were too inhibited to discuss it, one girl spoke of her resentment towards her husband every time he got satisfaction and she was more frustrated than ever. I think this typifies the reliance most women feel on a man to give them satisfaction, instead of being more independent and getting to know their own bodies themselves.
Yours with much love
Alison Buckley

Coming soon - an article on Sex Therapy, and ways in which women can learn together about their sexual physiology and responses.

Woman's Place on the Farm

Cutting from *Farmers Weekly* sent in by Peter Moore, Bristol

SIR-I read the letter headed "Give young college men a chance" (FW, Feb.21). Not only young men, but young women too, need a chance. Remember the Land Girls?

My experience of employing women to look after livestock has been most favourable, and their natural domestic desire to keep yards and housing wholesome is most welcome among my pedigree cattle.

Although women lack the physical strength of men I have found this to be a minor disadvantage. It shows up only during calving and humping 1cwt bags.

My problem is to find a source of supply of such women. My present girl is leaving at the end of April. I do not need someone with considerable experience, but just enough to realise what being out in all weather really means.

I take on all the major decisions for myself and train a new employee to do the various tasks for the day-to-day running of the farm. This has worked very well with completely unqualified material.

Willing hands and watchful eyes are worth much more than a "know it all" or "expert", but I wholeheartedly agree that a young college man would be the best investment.
PEDIGREE CATTLE FARMER.



SHORTLIST

Please send any information to Jill Nicholls, Shortlist, Spare Rib, 9 Newburgh St., London W1A 4XS.

events

* Events are listed in chronological order.

NUS Festivals

"International Women's Year – don't just celebrate, agitate!"

The NUS Women's Campaign Committee has called a week of action November 3–7 culminating in the Women's Conference in Bristol on November 8. Briefing document and details from Penny Cooper, NUS, 3 Endsleigh St, London WC1H 0DV (01-387 1277).

The Family and the Invalid Child

The Invalid Children's Aid Association is organising a one-day conference on marital stress in families with a sick or handicapped child. They say it will interest "paediatricians, doctors, health visitors, marriage guidance counsellors, social workers, teachers and anyone else involved in medical, social or educational work, as well as the interested lay person." On November 6, 10–5, at Imperial College, South Kensington, London. Registration £5.55.

Day-Time Television

Meeting on November 6 at 7.15pm in the Broadmead Baptist Church meeting room, Bristol, for all women interested in watching and discussing women's day-time TV programmes and adult education on TV. Then viewing sessions on the four following Thursdays, afternoons and/or evenings. Please come and bring friends, especially if you actually watch day-time TV.

Women against Torture

Women from 30 organisations have worked with Amnesty International to set up a one-day conference to draw attention to the plight of women prisoners of conscience (political and religious) and to try to combat the increasing use of torture. Speakers, then workshops on: the psychology of the torturer, prisoners and their families, education on human rights and responsibilities, the psychology of repressive regimes, individual woman prisoners, prison conditions. On November 8, 9.30–6, in Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., London WC1. Admission 50p, OAPs and students 25p.

Portugal: Theatre-Benefit

Five British Theatre groups (including Women's Theatre Group) perform to raise money for OFICINA SAMBA, a revolutionary theatre group working in Portugal. In Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., London WC1. On November 10 at 8pm. Admission £1.

Women and Crime Group

Meets every Tuesday at 7pm in Room 321 of the Polytechnic of Central London, Marylebone Rd., London NW1. On November 11 the subject is women in prison, with Christine Miles, ex-inmate of Holloway and of Risley Remand Centre, talking about her experience.

Working for World Peace

A symposium on women working for world peace, arranged for International Women's Year by the Association of World Federalists. Speakers from the House of Lords, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Women for Disarmament. On November 11 at 7pm in Committee Room II, The House of Commons. Free apparently.

Sappho Disco

Upstairs bar "Sols Arms" Hampstead Rd., London NW1 (nearest tube Warren St.). On November 29, 8–12. Entrance 50p, women only.

campaigns

Abortion Campaign Calendar

Just out – A Woman's Right To Choose 1976 Calendar. Page size 8½x12". 13 photos of the 1975 campaign, with a page for every month and dates of important events in the history of birth control and abortion. £1 plus postage from AWRTC, 186 Kings Cross Rd., London WC1X 9DE. Give them to your friends for Christmas – all proceeds to A Woman's Right To Choose.



From A Woman's Right To Choose calendar 1976.

Working Women's Charter

Conference on November 16, 2–8pm, at the AUEW Hall, Vaughan Way, Leicester. Main speaker probably Audrey Wise MP. Workshops on women in the hosiery industry, low pay, the welfare state, childcare, education, historical perspectives, women and trade unions, the abortion campaign and battered women. Creche available.

Commonwealth Women Writers

This year's Commonwealth Book Exhibition is about women – one section of books by women, another of books on "the place of women in society". November 17–28 in New Zealand House, London.

Aberdeen IWY Event

Fair/exhibition, drama, etc., for International Women's Year in the Music Hall, Aberdeen on November 29. Contact Dr Mary Esslemont, 30 Beechgrove Terrace, Aberdeen (Aberdeen 53601).

Hospital for Vietnam

The British Hospital for Vietnam campaign aims to raise £800,000 in one year to build a hospital in Ha Tinh, one of the most heavily bombed provinces in Vietnam. The medical network of that area – one provincial hospital, eight district hospitals and over 250 community health stations – was destroyed in the first US offensive against the North. Much of it was rebuilt during the bombing pause in the late sixties, but destroyed again in the renewed offensive of 1971–72. Medical teams worked underground in pits and trenches, performing emergency operations with the minimum of equipment. Now they can work above ground but the buildings are only mud and thatch shelters.

The Vietnamese people have suffered a lifetime of imperialist aggression. Now they have won their independence they face a lifetime of reconstruction. This hospital is badly needed. Please send donations to

The British Hospital for Vietnam, St Mary of the Angels, Moorhouse Rd., London W2. If you'd like to help by forming a group, organising a fund-raising event or anything else, ring Sarah 01-221 4936.

National Women's Aid Federation

The NAWF is a democratic co-ordinated group of women helping other women who have been battered. We provide support when necessary, but know that a woman who has taken a decision to leave home is usually capable of making any other decision. The 29 refuges are self-help, and any other help necessary is offered by support groups. Refuges often need people to help in areas such as giving the women a break from the kids. More campaigns against local authorities who refuse to admit that battering occurs are needed. The NAWF is planning a new campaign using print, posters and film, and a follow-up to the Select Committee's recent report which points out the ineffectuality of the police, housing and social service departments. Contact them at 31 Clapham Rd., London SW8 (01-870 6850).

services

Bristol Gay Switchboard

Based in Bristol but responsible at present for Cornwall, Wiltshire, Avon, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Glamorgan and Dyfed. A Plymouth switchboard will be working soon, and Welsh volunteers would be welcome. There are already gay switchboards in Manchester 061-273 3725, Birmingham 021-449 8312, London 01-837 7324, and Brighton 0273-27878. Bristol's number is 712621; address c/o The Women's Centre, 11 Waverly Rd., Redland, Bristol 6.

The switchboard is run by volunteers from the gay women's group, Gay Liberation Front, CHE, etc., from 8–10.30 each night. Ring up for information about pubs, clubs, groups, hotels, or simply if you need to talk. You can help by giving time, publicity or money.

One Parent Families

In 1973 the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child changed its name to the National Council for One Parent Families. Since then they've had far fewer single pregnant girls and women coming to them for advice and help. They're afraid that people don't see the significance of their new name so they're distributing a poster with this text: "Well, you're on your own now!" Hard words. If they were meant for your ears the chances are that you're pregnant, single and desperate. Free help is yours for the asking. Their policy is to offer all the available alternatives to the pregnant woman – having the baby, having it adopted, abortion – without putting any pressure on her. Contact them at 255 Kentish Town Rd., London NW5 (01-267 1361).

centres

AIM, Dublin

The AIM (action, information, motivation) group formed in Dublin in 1971 to campaign for Family Law Reform. In September it opened a women's centre, the first in Ireland. It has two ground floor rooms, suitable for discussions, interviews and committee work, and a coffee bar. At first it will offer advice and referral on legal and social aspects of marital breakdown, a research and reading library, with women's books and newsletters, etc., from women's groups abroad, information and discussion groups on such subjects as women's health and employment, and an "events" board. Other women's organisations can rent the centre.

At 44 Lower Mount St., Dublin 2. Open to all women every Tues, Wed and Thurs, 10-12 and 2.30-4.30. AIM would like posters from women's centres in Britain, and is interested in an exchange of newsletters for the library. Write to the centre or ring Deirdre McDevitt, Dublin 882574.

Women's Centre for Lewisham

The Lewisham Committee for International Women's Year is hoping to open a women's centre by the end of this year. Dozens of local women's groups support the idea and the local council is helping finance it. The centre could provide a day-long creche service, a drop-in centre, self-help health groups and co-counselling, and an information service. For more information or to help contact Carol Kay 01-699 7547.

arts

Knitted Costumes

To wear or to hang on the wall. Designed by a Persian woman, Pury Sharifi, and on show at Whitechapel Art Gallery, Whitechapel High St., London E1 7QX from November 4 to December 21.

Women and Work in Hackney

Excellent exhibition of photographs of women at work in Hackney - machinists, outworkers, typists, teachers, laundrywomen, chavs - backed up by facts and figures about women's wages, pensions, conditions, housework. It has been on show at Hackney Town Hall and Hackney Public Library, but is now available for loan - to women's groups, teachers, whoever wants to use it. Contact Jo Spence, 152 Upper St., London N1 (01-226 0367).

films

One Two Three

Film about a childcare centre, reviewed in *Spare Rib* no.39. Showing and discussion on November 21 at 8pm in St Marks Hall, York Rise, London NW5. Admission free.

Audio-Visual Materials

An annotated bibliography of audio-

visual materials on woman's role in society, especially for use in education. Contains details of films, sound- and video-tapes teachers and others might want to use. Compiled by Helen Taylor and available from her at 17 Southernhay Ave., Clifton Wood, Bristol BS8 4TJ. Free but send sae.



From *Basic Video in Community Work*, an Inter-Action Handbook.

pamphlets

Libertarian Women's Newsletter

A small and uncohesive group of women is trying to revive the libertarian women's newsletter, which appeared regularly till 1972. The first issue simply asks women to write and say what they see as "libertarianism", so the group can see if there's enough common ground to keep talking. Send your ideas and some money to Alison Malet, 1 Lynnewood Place, Dundee, Scotland.

The Irrational in Politics

by M Brinton
Solidarity Pamphlet 33
96pp, 40p plus postage from 123 Lathom Rd., London E6
New edition of a text first published in 1970. Since then Reich's works have come out in Pelican, which makes it unnecessary to quote him so extensively. And since then, as Brinton says in the introduction, "The rise of the Women's Liberation Movement has ensured that many of the notions rather tentatively put forward in this pamphlet are now widely accepted" - notions that is of sexual liberation and sexual politics. That's no reason though not to reassess them.

"We are not saying that the sexual revolution is *the* revolution. We have not abandoned the fight for the Revolution to become 'prophets of the better orgasm'. We are not saying that sexual factors are to be substituted for economic ones in the understanding of social reality... What we are saying is that revolution is a total phenomenon or it is nothing, that a social revolution that is not also a sexual revolution is unlikely to have gone much below the surface of things..."

Very much about male sexuality - or rather sexuality 'in general' in

which the female is submerged. But a strong statement of libertarian politics, written in sneering opposition to the "so-called revolutionaries (Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, etc.) of authoritarian practices and institutions."

Inter-Action Handbooks

Beautifully produced handbooks on community projects - suitable for statutory authorities and funding bodies as well as the individuals involved. Recent editions include: *Print - How You Can Do It Yourself* (56pp, 70p), *Community Newspapers* (32pp, 50p), and *Basic Video in Community Work* (32pp, 50p). All available, plus 10p postage, from Inter-Action Advisory Service, 14 Talacre Rd., London NW5 4PE.

Street Research 6

31pp, 20p plus postage from 365 Kennington Rd., London SE11
A jumble of articles for people to use, including a piece about printing - how to do it yourself - an exposee of the military's think-tank - the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI) - and the case against Housing Associations.

Language, Truth and Politics

by Trevor Pateman
112pp, £1.50 postfree from 1 Church Green, Newton Poppleford, nr Sidmouth, Devon
Deals with the ways in which our use of language helps or hinders us in changing our social situation. It is simply written and it would be encouraging if this book were widely discussed. It asks key questions about day-to-day failures to communicate. Why does ideology succeed in

distancing people from the possibility of changing their lives by their own actions? What part does language play in this?

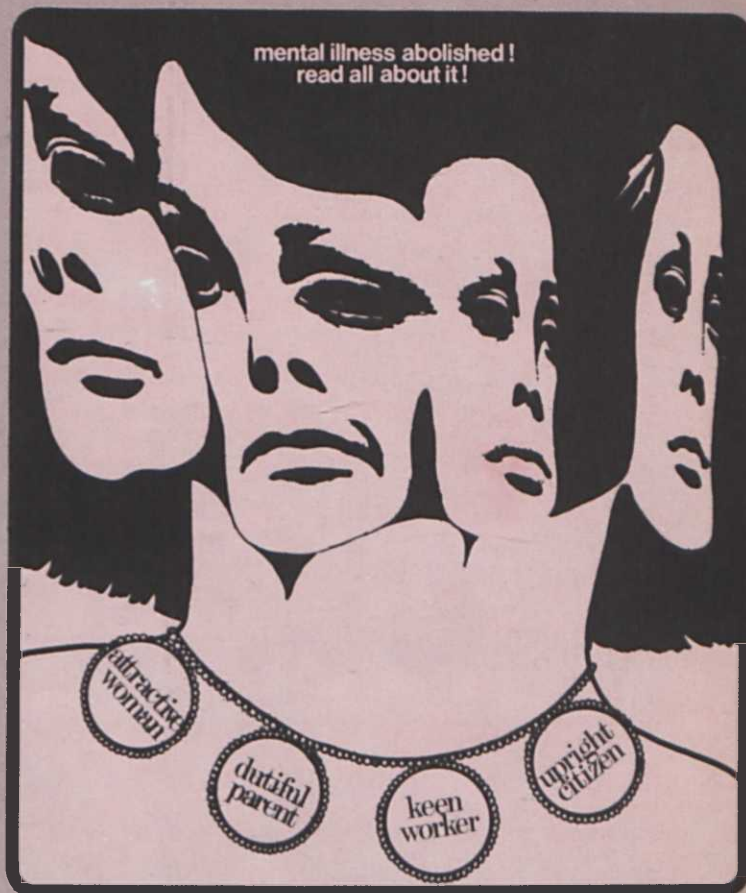
Humpty Dumpty 6 and 7

48pp, 30p
Special double issue of "New Humpty Dumpty Today (mental illness abolished! read all about it!)"
About mental distress, ways of looking at it, ways of coping with it. Concentrates on NHS psychiatry and mental hospitals rather than anti-psychiatry and alternative communities - on the grounds that most people have no choice.

Includes a very interesting interview with members of the Mental Patients Union (37 Mayola Rd., London E5), who are trying to make patients more aware of their rights and to press for changes in the running of mental hospitals - the right to choose and refuse treatment, an end to compulsory hospitalisation.

Also accounts by psychiatrists working in a state-run therapeutic community, a liberal psychiatric unit for adolescents and a far from liberal mental hospital - St Augustine's, near Canterbury. There's a supplement on psychiatry in China, and some thoughts on political therapy in this society.

They are planning three future issues simultaneously - one on sexual politics, with special reference to the way women and gay people are discriminated against by psychology; one on the teaching of psychology, and one on childcare. If you think you could contribute to any of these issues, contact Humpty Dumpty, 28 Redbourne Ave., London N3 2BS.



From *Humpty Dumpty*.

RACISM

Spare Rib editorials are not always written by members of the collective. We decide on a particular subject for an editorial and then look for the person or the group who we feel is best able to write about it. We invite them to a meeting and the editorial they write develops out of our discussion. This month Amrit Wilson writes about the position of Asian women in Britain.

For generations Asian women have accepted an inferior role within the family. In Britain they have come face to face with a new form of oppression — racism. They can see it clearly and are rejecting its degrading impositions.

Very few white women can know or imagine what a battle with racist society means. In Britain racism is like a cage, a system of bars which defines the position of black women and men, limiting their freedom, their choice of jobs, cutting down their aspirations, attacking them and their children emotionally and physically. It is these bars that black women have to break.

Black workers are offered far lower wages, far worse conditions than white workers; all this can be seen with brighter than daylight clarity, but it is equally clear that black women are at the bottom of this sub-proletariat which black workers are forced to provide. As an Indian woman in a North London factory said: "It is a ladder and we are near the bottom, our men are halfway up and the white people are at the top. They think they can keep us like that and when they don't need us they can throw the ladder away. But they are wrong, we are going to change that." Asian women are fighting back and in doing so they are changing their own personalities. They can see sexual discrimination every day of their working lives, and having learned to recognise it they have begun to perceive it within their own families and to think about their liberation as women. But in this they cannot afford to forget the presence of racism. In strikes where Asian women come out on the issue of sexism they cannot always expect their white sisters to support them; in fact there have been strikes (at Mansfield hosiery,

for example) where white women workers have sided with white men against their own interests as women.

White women are often interested in the problems of their Asian sisters within the Asian communities; their reaction to the Asian women's problems is "How appalling!" But I wonder if it is possible for them to imagine what it is really like to live the life of an Asian woman — to be an Asian woman in Salwar Kameez (trousers tight at the ankle) who doesn't speak English, sweeping the floor at Heathrow Airport till ten o'clock at night. How many English women can identify with her, do they know or wonder where she lives, in what sort of housing, or what her relationship with her family might be like?

Perhaps it is too difficult because Asian women, particularly older ones, are seen as almost identical with their culture — complex, incomprehensible — seen through veils whether they wear them or not. Since the Asian woman is her culture her every act takes on for English people a depersonalising cultural significance. When an Asian girl decides to wear Western clothes, for example, it is considered not as a decision by the girl purely for her own convenience or even an emotional barrier she has crossed, but as a victory for Britain in the battle between Indian and British cultures for her soul. A typical remark which I encountered when I started wearing trousers rather than a sari was "I am so glad you have covered your tummy up." Implying that my tummy being visible was somehow a flag of defiance on a foreign ship in the English harbour and covering it up was an acknowledgement of the superiority of British culture. That kind of remark, usually made by women, shows the extent to which colonial and missionary attitudes linger on in Britain. They are a hangover from the days of the British Empire. In the mid-nineteenth century large numbers of Englishwomen first went to India. Their 'mission' in India was to 'save' the Englishman for England and to save British culture in India. Anglo-Indian women were seen by them as threats, but Indians, particularly Indian women, were seen through totally alienated eyes as strange, unsavoury, a different breed with whom no

communication was possible.

The shadows of this alienation persist in Britain now, shaping attitudes and forming mental barriers between Asian and white women. Racist children's books, the glorification of the empire, the endless racist jokes, the frequent implication in the media that any Englishwoman who has managed to live in Africa or Asia is a heroine just for that, all intensify this alienation. One effect of this is described by Buchi Emecheta (Interview, p 14), when a black woman intellectual is seen as strange and exotic by white men and as a threat by white women. But it has another, more common aspect, embodied in the treatment of black women factory workers in Southall, Leicester and Birmingham. They are seen as strange, but far from exotic; rather they are seen as so inferior that they need not be treated like women at all but can be exploited almost as though they were animals — a 'docile labour force' for British capital. That is how black women are treated by white men and by white women in Britain, and the effect cannot be ignored.

For the white women's liberationist who want to be involved in black women's struggles, there exists a minefield of misunderstandings. If, for example, she attempts to discuss the sexist nature of Indian society in order to convince Indian women of the need for their liberation as women, she may find not only that she is looked on with distrust but that her own arguments deteriorate into that common form of British racism — cultural superiority. A white woman's comments on the male chauvinism of black communities serves no purpose. In any case the struggle for women's liberation in a community can only come from within that community. What white women could do more effectively to help in the liberation of their black sisters is to support already existing struggles of black women — to support their strikes, make political issues of their at-present-ignored battles with immigration officers, to take a stand on racist education methods if you are a parent, to refuse to implement them if you are a teacher; in other words, to attack the racism which defines the position of black women in British society. □

SEXISM

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"There used to be some prestige in marrying a white woman" . . . Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian living in London, talks to *Amrit Wilson* about the effect of colonialism on sexual attitudes, the traditions which bind women's lives in Nigeria and the pressures facing Nigerian women in London. *Buchi Emecheta* has written two novels, *In the Ditch* and *Second Class - Citizen* which are reviewed here by *Smita Caulker*.

Amrit: *Are Nigerians in England mainly immigrants or are they students?*

Buchi: In the 60s people who came here were mainly immigrants. But because of the 1971 Immigration Act, Nigerian immigrants are no longer allowed in, those who have come in the 70s are mainly students and even they are not allowed in unless they can show that they are bona fide students. Most of these students are men who usually bring their wives.

Amrit: *Is British education still valued in Nigeria?*

Buchi: Yes, the old colonial attitudes have not died down. Nigeria has a tradition-bound society and things take a long time to change. The British penetrated very deep into our society.

Amrit: *But they weren't there very long were they?*

Buchi: Long enough. Of course earlier on there were the Portuguese, then there were the slave traders, but the British penetrated the deepest.

Amrit: *What have been the effects of colonialism on sexual attitudes. How do you think Nigerian men regard white women?*

Buchi: As a mystery. For a long time the white woman has been treated as though she is something very special. But now Nigerian men are realising how strong the cultural conflict is when they go home to Nigeria with a white woman. Many marriages break up and when the white woman can't cope she gets blamed. There used to be some prestige in marrying a white woman but that is dying down.

Amrit: *What about the attitude of English men to black women?*

Buchi: Well, their attitude to black intellectuals is very strange. They have this idea that a woman, especially if she is single, needs to be protected and patronised. Their attitude to an ordinary black woman who goes to work in a factory is very different but they seem to think that the educated black woman needs a lot more protection than the educated white woman.

Another thing is that most Nigerian men are students, so the women have to go out to work. In most cases, in fact, the husband brought the wife here just for that purpose. These are the most obvious factors which make the Nigerian woman feel that she has to foster her child.

Buchi Emecheta

Amrit: *What about the attitude of English women to black women?*

Buchi: They are — I don't like to use this word — but they are very bitchy. If I go for a job and there are only women interviewing I never get it. They seem to be much more afraid, sort of view you with suspicion. The men don't do that.

Amrit: *Is that a result of colonial attitudes?*

Buchi: I think in a way it is because English people in the colonies saw their own women as made especially to be educated. Faced with an educated black woman English men don't know what to make of it and they may want to know what is going on inside you. But English women feel threatened. In general they tend to be much more prejudiced and anti-foreigners than men. There was a review of my book in a magazine called *She*. The girl who did the review pointed this out and said that what Adah goes through shows what women can do to women from other societies; and that is very, very true.

Amrit: *You mention fostering in your book. Why is it that so many Nigerian parents have their babies fostered?*

Buchi: For many different reasons. In Nigeria the responsibility for children is taken by the whole extended family, so that someone other than the mother frequently looks after a child. This is coupled to the fact that Nigerian women don't know, at least to start with, how to cope with their children in this environment. They see the nice English baby, well looked after, with shining nappies — in Nigeria they don't need to wear nappies. If a baby is sick you put the baby on your back and continue with your work. Here everything is different. The Nigerian woman feels inferior to the British woman even in looking after her own baby. So she feels she will have to take her baby somewhere where it can be made to look like an English child.



In addition there is the middle class Nigerian idea that white things are good: that the child, although he may spend the rest of his life in Nigeria, must speak English. Sometimes Nigerians who go back home boast of the money they have spent on a "white mother" for their children. They want their child to speak like Alec Douglas Home but they never stop to think why, when the Englishman does not learn our language.

Amrit: *You refused to have your kids fostered but do you know anyone who did have her kids fostered?*

Buchi: Oh yes, most of my friends. In fact I am the only one who has brought up her own children. My children are so happy when they arrive home from school you can hear them calling out from the door as they come in. A few Nigerian women realise when they see my children that it can be done, that it is possible to bring up one's own children in Britain.

Amrit: *What sort of people are the foster parents?*

Buchi: There is no general rule. They are the people who need money or they are middle-class people who are just curious to see what a black baby looks like. And there is another type who will take anything for a pet — a black child is a curiosity to show their friends. They are a combination of all these types. I think a woman is paid about £7 a week for taking a child in London.

Amrit: *What are the chief problems of Nigerian women at work in England?*

Buchi: Well, of course, they are exploited and paid very little, like Indian women. They often work in small, non-unionised factories. But they know it is temporary (they are only here for a limited period) they always say, "You do your best and go". The other workers, white workers, talk down to you. But white people tend to talk down to you until you prove that you are not going to accept it. That goes on right from the factory-floor to the university. The only advantage of working in a factory is that you know you can leave any day even if it is exploitive and ill-paid.

Amrit: *How do women cope with these terrible conditions of stress?*

Buchi: Sometimes the conditions are so terrible that they can't cope. A woman I know tries to attack her husband when he comes home. It is because of the isolation she feels, because he has progressed (he is a sociologist) and she is left behind still working at the same factory. Yes, some women do react, unless they bottle it up like me and that is bad too.

Amrit: *How are girls treated within the family in Nigeria?*

Buchi: To start with they are spoilt and their family looks after them as one of the valued possessions. Often, of course, the husband looks on her in the same way. The trouble comes only when a woman wants to be independent. When a girl gets married the husband has to pay a bride price to her family. It used to be about £20 — that was considered very reasonable — but now it has gone up out of all proportion.

Amrit: *Does a woman's position or status change after marriage?*

Buchi: No, even when she has children her position does not change. Although her position in her husband's eyes is enhanced if she has sons. Daughters are regarded as people who are going away from the family anyway, they are going to be bought by somebody else. So it is only the sons who maintain the family.

Amrit: *Are women aware of being oppressed?*

Buchi: They are not rebellious in the sense they are here, but most of them, especially if they are educated, are aware of what their position is. But there is no movement of women's liberation as there is here. As for women in the villages, there is no means for them to come together. If a woman runs away from her husband she can go to her own family but they usually support the husband and make fun of her. If she has a very strong father who will stick up for her it is different, but usually they say the man is not in the wrong, the trouble is with the woman.

Amrit: *How many times can a man marry?*

Buchi: As many times as he wants to. It just depends on how rich he is and how many women he can cope with. If he is not satisfied it is perfectly okay for him to marry again. But a woman must have only one husband at a time.

Amrit: *Your first two books, In the Ditch and Second Class Citizen are based on your own experiences aren't they?*

Buchi: Yes, they are 90% autobiographical.

Amrit: *Are you writing any more books?*

Buchi: My third book *The Bride Price* is coming out in December. It is not autobiographical but it is probably best described as documentary fiction. It is about a girl whose bride-price is not paid and the psychological effect this has on her. In the end I had to kill her. She had to die because she had broken the tradition. She died in child-birth, not from physical causes, but because she felt she had shamed her parents and she had no will to live.

Amrit: *Is that kind of thing fairly common?*

Buchi: Oh yes. For example I blame myself sometimes because I refused to have my bride-price paid. Sometimes I think that is why my marriage broke down. I lost my parents when I was a little girl and there were various other reasons why I refused the bride-price being paid by my husband to my family. It is like being an outcast if you refuse this and, of course, if you are very young as most girls are when they get married, it makes a deep impression on you and you feel unwanted. It had a very bad effect on my marriage. As I have described in my book, when I started writing, my husband destroyed my first attempt so I only really started after I left him. It is not really that he was a bad person but he was not ready to accept an independent woman. woman. ■

Buchi Emecheta



JEANETTE BECKMAN

Book reviews

In The Ditch Barrie and Jenkins
Second-class Citizen Allison and Busby

Buchi Emecheta's Adah, is a woman — black and poor — excellent qualifications for second-class citizenship. Her books, *In The Ditch* and *Second-class Citizen*, are autobiographical accounts of her struggle for survival in Britain.

Second-class Citizen begins with Adah's childhood in Nigeria. Though a woman, she dreams of an education, and a visit to the United Kingdom, the heaven that will give her the status needed for a good life in her newly independent country. Her dream takes her through school, finds her a suitable student husband and enables her to produce babies and tend to the needs of her extended family, all the while secretly charting her personal course.

Once in England however, she is trapped not only by her sex, but also by her social and economic position in society. She and her family are forced, like other African students, to cram together in tiny, unsanitary rooms which are treasured like gold, so hard are they to come by. Like all small communities, especially those born out of a common need for survival in a hostile environment, codes of behaviour are rigid and Adah's unwillingness to conform — she will not foster her children — makes her a prime target for ridicule and spite. She finds no support or companionship from her husband whose belief in his natural supremacy is exaggerated by his growing sense of inferiority and failure. For example, he punishes her for her fertility yet will not hear of birth control.

By sheer will-power and a fierce yearning for life, Adah manages to work, care for her babies, give birth to two more, and to tolerate a demanding man, all the while trying to cope with a society that despises her and conducts itself in a manner that seems spiritless and cold after the exuberance of her Nigeria. As an outlet, she turns to writing and pours out her disillusionment and longing in a novel that gives her a glimpse of her own potential. Finally, with four young children and another on the way she leaves her husband determined to find some margin of respect for herself and her family.

Buchi Emecheta does not set out to comment either on the slavery of women or the evils of a racist, capitalist society yet the simplicity with which she writes leads inevitably to a damning exposé of both. We are shown the world of those Africans, and they are many, who did not survive the mad scramble to Europe for paper qualifications in the late fifties and early sixties. They are condemned to a self-imposed exile in an alien, often savage society for they cannot face the prospect of going back home with nothing but failure. Then there is the portrait of an African man as brutal and oppressive as any other man can be, and

this at a time when many African writers prefer to present our people as characters in a Utopian dream. Yet the main comment remains the one borne out of Adah's predicament, that of anyone, black or white, trapped at the bottom of the British social scale, forced to live on charity from a society that has gone too far to give a damn even when it would like to and it is this story that is continued in *In The Ditch*.

Here, Buchi Emecheta is much more aware of the machinery that keeps her in the North London Slum and this awareness makes for self-conscious, naive writing at times. This does not detract from the power of her account however, for the experiences she shares with other women like herself, some tied to broken, ineffective men, others struggling alone to keep their families together and what little self-respect the Welfare System has left them, speak for themselves.

Although Pussy Mansions Flats offers more space for herself and her children, rats, cockroaches and damp attack the inside, while dogs use her front door as a toilet. The tenants are faced with a system that offers social workers, child-minders and other beneficial handouts. Yet it lowers an already insufficient allowance if you are lucky enough to have a job. Carol, the social worker, is a perfect example of the double message operating in the social welfare system. She seems to care genuinely for the families she deal with — her office is a haven where the women can get together for warmth and recreation — yet she seems more attached to her role as do-gooder than she does to actually helping them to get out of the slum. The other professionals are seen as totally ineffective, incapable of taking a truly productive step, interested only in keeping the situation quiet and stagnant — Adah and her children are offered a flat fourteen floors from the ground. Yet despite the endless struggle against the cold and grime, the endless juggling of allowances to cover heating, food, clothes for the many children, this is a community where laughter and companionship exist. The women for the most part, live without hope of love. Sex is a clandestine happening — they lower your dole money if you have a 'fancy man' — yet there is little loneliness here and much support. When Adah finally gets a decent home, it is clean and white and dry but she will probably never know her neighbours. Moving up the social ladder, as she soon discovers, means coming to terms with isolation and a way of life that is stilted and unreal. And Buchi Emecheta ends her book in the middle of a conversation, as if there is another story to be told.

Smita Caulker

NEWS

A PLAYGROUP CALLED FREEDOM

For working class women in Northern Ireland there is no escape from the presence of the British army, from the day-to-day struggle in the streets. No escape either from the drudgery of housework and childcare. Here a group of women from Armagh, a county town 35 miles south west of Belfast, describe their fight to form a playgroup on their housing estate. The playgroup, which opens in December, will be called "Saorise" — "Freedom" in Irish.

Until the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in 1968, over 80% of the houses occupied by Catholics in Armagh were unfit for habitation. Indeed some of the houses dated back to the time of the Famine in 1847.

This was part of the overall plan to maintain a Unionist (Protestant) controlled council in a town that is 65% anti-Unionist (Catholic). Catholics were kept in one area and the houses allowed to stand in 'condemned' condition. Because of the way votes were allocated in Northern Ireland, this meant that the Unionist minority had more votes. The council has always been nearly 100% Unionist.

With the agitation of local Civil Rights leaders, exposing such sectarianism, housing became a priority, and Catholics were rehoused in newly built estates.

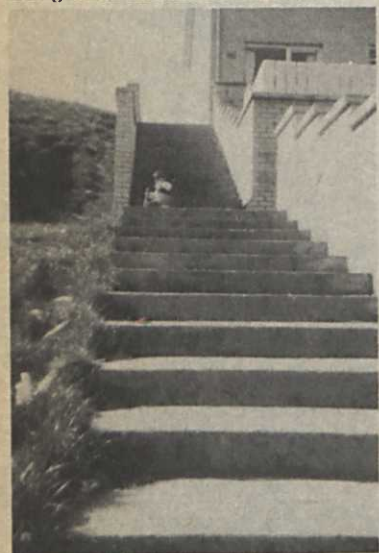
New Estates for Catholics

At a cursory glance our estate appears ideal, surrounded by pleasant green fields with a river running close by. Closer inspection shows that it is far from ideal, and any of the women living here can testify to that.▷



NEWS

The estate is built on a very steep hill which should have been levelled — instead large concrete steps join one level to another. There are over 400 of these steps, not counting those at the front and back of houses, as many as 30 up to one house. Dangerous unfenced walls mask



Steps on the estate

drops of up to 15 feet in places. The one supermarket, very expensive, is situated in the middle of the estate. To reach it from the bottom you have to climb 83 feet. Picture that with a shopping bag, toddlers and perhaps a pram! Old age pensioners live in bungalows at the bottom of the estate; none of them have ever seen the shop. The estate is a mile and a half from the town centre; there is no bus service, and a taxi costs 35p.

Most of the people living here are newly married, so the percentage of pre-school children is very high. The structural dangers are a constant nightmare to mothers continually 'on guard' with playing kids. The planners have erected a 'play area' — we call it a death trap — which is totally unsuitable for any child under 10. It is built beside the only entrance to and exit from the estate, and the swings, slide and steel climbing frame have already claimed many pre-school victims, some of whom required hospitalisation.

Nothing but Bingo

With the constantly high male unemployment figures, Armagh like most towns has followed the traditional pattern with plenty of social outlets and meeting places for the men, like pubs and bookies, while the women stay at home, isolated, with nothing but the bingo, some pubs or the recently-opened cinema.

One woman who moved here from Belfast where she had been involved with other women called a few of us together one

evening, primarily to talk about the problems we had living here. The major thing discussed was childcare. We came to realise that by running a nursery or playgroup on a co-operative basis we would not only be helping our kids but we'd be going a long way in alleviating some of our own problems. The question was where to hold it and how to finance it.

Sectarian Centre

A large community centre had been built on the estate in 1972, but had stood empty since then because no official body was prepared to take financial responsibility for opening and running it. It had cost £48,000. It's around this centre that our fight has revolved. We decided that its minor hall was an ideal site for the playgroup, but the centre was not available to the community.

The Unionist-dominated Armagh District Council has refused to take over responsibility for it, although under the Youth and Recreational Service Order Act (1973) N.I. they were entitled to. The council gave various excuses as to why they would not take it on — "Rise in rates" or "If we give you a community centre, everyone will want one". We think every estate like this should have one.

The council's decision is generally accepted as sectarian — the Unionist council discriminating against the anti-Unionist citizens by refusing them access to the community centre. A battle raged over this, but the Tenants' Association and the Community Association soon bowed out of the fight.*

In April 1975 the Housing Executive of Northern Ireland told the press they were going to brick up the centre in a bid to combat vandalism. But the Housing Executive had previously refused to spend money either to secure the building or to make it usable. For the older kids the centre had become a symbolism of sectarianism. We have always maintained that if the place had been used from the start the vandalism would not have occurred.

Troublemakers and Lefties?

We decided to form a strong committee to combat the council. We called an emergency meeting of women interested in the nursery. At that meeting we decided to move in, clean up the place and take it over as it stood, in order to show the council and the Housing Executive that they would not get out of things so lightly. We issued a press statement laying the blame for the damage to the centre at the feet of Armagh District

Council.

In an effort to identify people in the area with what should be their community centre we organised a grocery sale in May this year, collecting groceries throughout the town and selling them for next to nothing. This was the first time the centre had been used. We made £75 for the playgroup and planned to start it as soon as possible, either by fixing up the minor hall ourselves or by squatting the first available house on the estate.

All this time the Tenants' Association did nothing except engage themselves in a smear campaign against the women, calling us Provies (members of the Provisional wing of the Irish Republican Army), trouble-makers and lefties. The Tenants' Association was dominated by Stickies (members of the official IRA) and we were exposing their inadequacy and ineffectiveness.†

We'd all become aware that by directly associating us with a particular organisation, in this case the Provisional IRA, they were really saying that as women we were not capable of doing all this ourselves — there must be some men in the background pushing us. And these are people who call themselves socialists and talk of women's rights.

Using the Building

We kept on using the hall to raise funds, expose the council and pressurise everyone in authority. The Housing Executive didn't even try to brick up the hall. We had women planted all over the estate in case they did, and the teenagers who

helped us clean the place up kept an eye on it in case of further vandalism or moves from 'above' to close it.

The weekly meetings went on. We were not restricted to playgroup matters as we had come to be seen on the estate as the only group interested in or capable of solving people's problems. The teenagers came to us for help, because with the daily sectarian assassinations — directed mostly against Catholics — they couldn't leave the estate day or night and had nothing to do.

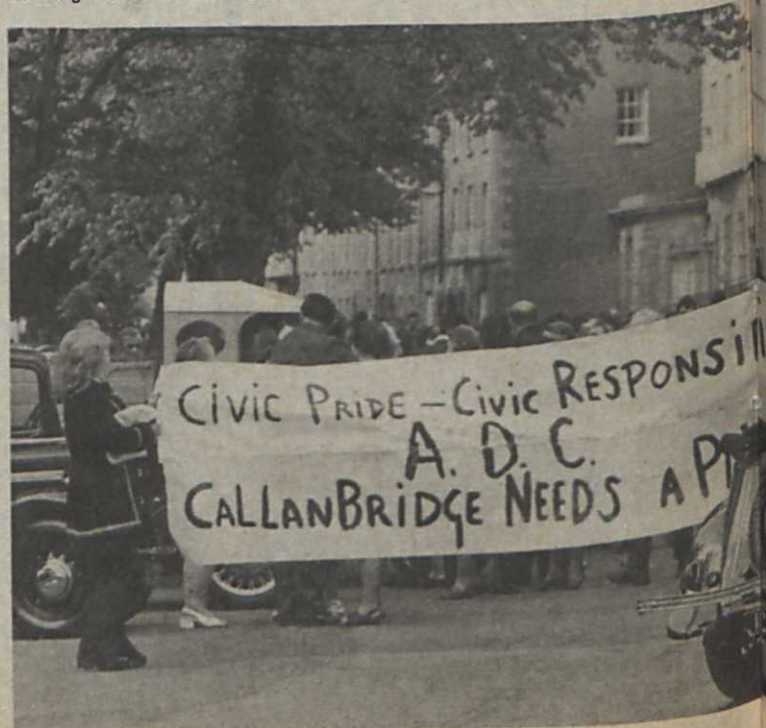
We advised them to identify their own problems and think of ways to solve them, promising help when required. We thought it important that the teenagers learn to make decisions on their own. As kids continually kept down by authority figures at home and in school this was difficult, but things have smoothed themselves out.

There is a youth committee who run discos and games nights, with minimal help from the women. We were able to get some equipment from the Dept of Education and when the weather is bad kids play in the centre. We also use it one night a week for a keep-fit class for women. This is popular and attracts women not just from this area but from all over the town.

Just Not Cricket

But the playgroup still needs a finished building and proper finance. Some people thought we should buy the centre ourselves but we didn't agree that working class people should have to pay for such facilities. So when local businessmen and the

Picketing the Civic Week Festival



NEW WOMEN'S RIGHTS CENTRE: FEMINISM IN A MALE LEGAL WORLD

A Women's Rights Centre Conference took place at the Co-op Hall, North London on September 27 to discuss the setting up of a centre to help with the legal problems of women and the movement.

Despite torrential rain over seventy women were present. The meeting was addressed by a woman solicitor and a woman community worker from a law centre.

Since early this year women legal workers have been meeting to discuss the problem of maintaining a feminist viewpoint on women's legal problems while working in a male legal world. A women's rights centre would be a focus for all such problems.

The conference was intended to to publicise the idea and involve women with wider perspectives, so that the eventual centre reflected the needs of all women, not just of women lawyers.

Among other groups represented were Shelter, Up Against the Law, Release, various women's aid groups and women's centres. Delegates spent the morning in workshops discussing the areas a centre could work in. These include women and the welfare state, unions and employment, the family and discrimination generally.

In the afternoon, a plenary group discussed the form that the centre should not take cases on directly unless they were representative of a common problem and likely to improve the law.

A large role was foreseen in servicing women unionists and all kinds of feminist groups. It was agreed that funding should be approached with a view to getting the most money with the least strings.

A committee of volunteers was then formed, with a mandate to look for money, premises and staff, and to report back to another general meeting at the end of the year. We still need the involvement of women who are not working in or with the law, and who can ensure that the centre is aware of all the needs of women and groups affected by the law. Would anyone interested please ring 01-242 6408 between 4.30 and 6.00 pm any weekday for more details.

REPORT URGES 24-HOUR FAMILY CRISIS CENTRES

A Select Committee on Violence in Marriage — five women, eight men — has just published its first report on battered women. The report admits that the number of women being assaulted in their own home is much larger than they expected, and that this happens in "all strata of society".

The recommendations are designed to tackle the situation by slight but necessary changes in the law, help from Local Authorities in providing 1 refuge place per 10,000 of the population, relevant education for school children (primarily using domestic science lessons), police, and organisations which meet battered women.

They have been "disappointed and alarmed by the ignorance and apparent apathy of some Government Departments and individual Ministers".

A main recommendation is that 24-hour Family Crisis Centres be set up and, like refuges, be run cheaply by voluntary groups. They would have a dual role of research (necessary, but too expensive independently) and duplicating the work of social service departments should be carrying out.

"Wives, husbands and children would approach them for help — they would provide an emergency service, co-ordinate local arrangements already available, and develop specialist advisory services, education and publicity campaigns."

A table of expenditure for 1971-2 in this area, ranging from Ministry of Defence £259.3 million to Home Office £2.5 million, shows that "research relating to crime and . . . social or internal defence gets very little priority".

There is passing comment on the 1974 Finer Report on One-Parent Families, understanding that "it would be unrealistic to expect speedy implementation". Unfortunately, by accepting Government cut-backs, they have been unable to attack the financial difficulties of women alone, nor examine their imposed economic and social inferiority.

A refuge (when the Local Authority allows one to exist) is temporary, but many battered women have only a long term choice between poor housing and poverty or surviving as long as possible dependent on a man. The Select Committee on Violence in Marriage — Report, Vol 1, HMSO, 65p

sectarian block in their minds. The exercise was worthwhile for apart from all the TV coverage it proved to other women that when organised nothing is impossible for us.

Plans Passed

The government was forced to take an interest, and a stop gap measure was found. The Dept of Education agreed to pay for the damage to and renovation of the centre, and the Housing Executive agreed to lease the hall to the Community Association for six months.

On September 14 we met some bigwigs (architects, ministries of this and that) and they agreed to renovate the minor hall first so that we can open the playgroup while the rest of the reconstruction is still going on. We put in our plans for small toilets, wash-basins etc, and we'll now have a community centre with a purpose-built room for a nursery.

Of course community nurseries are only stop-gap measures in themselves. We are demanding free nursery facilities for all children. But they will only be provided if we involve ourselves in projects such as this and break down some of the structure imposed on us by the system. We hope to create in the nursery an awareness of collectivity and sympathy amongst our children before they enter primary school.

We hope they will be equipped to combat the competitiveness and imposed inequality there, while we women will all the time be learning of our own repression and how to fight it together. The project has started to break down the isolation felt acutely by women living in a family set-up on estates like this. □

*The Tenants' Association is just for the estate. The Community Association covers a whole area — five estates. Each Tenants' Association has a representative on the overall Community Association, which manages the Community Centre.

† In 1970 the IRA split into two factions. The breakaway faction, the Provisionals, believe in a military solution to the present Irish crisis. The Official wing believes it should play only a defensive role militarily, while politically educating the working class. Both say they are fighting for a united socialist republic.

The playgroup needs money and non-sexist kids' books. Please send anything you can contribute to the Women's Collective on Ireland, c/o 114 Highbury New Park, London N5 and they will forward it.

Chamber of Commerce organised a Civic Week Festival in May we decided to cash in on it to publicise our needs. We 'invaded' various displays and events, distributed leaflets and talked to people about the playgroup and community centre.

At the end of the festival the Chairman of the District Council was to attend a Vintage Car Cavalcade in the centre of Armagh. We thought we would publicly embarrass him and the council by picketing with a banner we'd made: "Civic Pride, Civic Responsibility: Armagh District Council — We Need A Play Centre".

Like the centre of most towns in the North, the Mall in Armagh is considered Unionist territory. It's of Georgian design with a well-kept green for playing cricket. The only women's prison in N. Ireland stands at one end and the court-house at the other. Some women were afraid to go on the picket but a few of us brazened it out.

It was a frightening experience. We sneaked through the crowd into the middle of the road and unfurled the banner. This stopped the cavalcade for 15 minutes, much to the annoyance of the crowd and the RUC (the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the predominantly Protestant police force in N. Ireland), who couldn't give us the usual 'booting' because of all the press and TV people around.

We then went through the crowd giving out the leaflets. Most people refused even to take one, and some threatened us, calling us "Catholic bastards". The sad thing was that some people there wouldn't identify with our demand because of the



It is now possible to test for pregnancy very soon after conception. A new 'Conception' method has been developed at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London.

As with other urine tests, this one involves taking a sample of urine and examining its reaction to additives in order to find out whether a certain hormone — Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin — is present. A woman's body only produces this hormone (HCG) when she is pregnant.

The difference between the Conception test and other urine tests is that by using a more sensitive technique, involving a radio-active additive, tiny traces of the hormone HCG can be isolated long before it is possible with the other, less sensitive urine tests.

When a woman first becomes pregnant, she is producing only small amounts of HCG; that is why, with the usual test, one has to wait until there is a sufficient amount of HCG — ie after at least two weeks have elapsed since the first missed period. Even at that stage, a negative result may not be 100% reliable and it is sometimes necessary to have a re-test in a few days' time to make sure.

On the other hand, the Conception test is reliable ten days after conception — long before even a missed period, and positive results before that time would also be reliable.

The advantages of this test are not only that it can save women from weeks of anxiety and enable an early abortion to be performed if necessary; it can also help in the treatment of a woman who is unable to conceive, because it can show whether the problem is because she is infertile or whether the fertilised egg simply fails to implant in the womb.

Group Gentleness

The Conception test is, of course, irrelevant to feminists practising menstrual extraction. Menstrual extraction in a feminist group is "The concept of women extracting their monthly period on or about the day they are due. Women within the Self Help Movement have been utilizing this technique for over two years with no complications. With gentle suction, women have been able to enjoy the convenience and comfort of a five-minute as opposed to a five-day menstrual period". (Quoted from a report of the First International Menstrual Extraction Conference in *The Monthly Extract*, New Moon Communications, Box 3488 Ridgeway

NEW PREGNANCY TEST: Reliable before you've missed a period

Station, Stamford, Conn. 16905 USA).

Menstrual extraction, which can be used as a method of contraception whenever a period is overdue, is always used in groups, by a trained group of women all of whom are equals, who perform the procedure on each other when required. Gentleness is of prime importance, though it is rare that feminists need to be told to be gentle.

This emphasis on the politics of menstrual extraction as well as on the technique contrasts with the ways it has been used by the medical profession. A recent study in London involved women in so much pain that when they were asked if they would like to use menstrual extraction as a contraceptive, 96% said 'no way' and most of them just laughed.

The Del'Em menstrual extraction technique was invented and pioneered in America by Lorraine Rothman with the purpose of enabling women to control their own bodies. In the words of Ms Rothman, the job of the women's health movement 'will be complete only when each woman has the right, the technology and the access to methods to control her own body'.

Research Projects Only

This brings us back to the new pregnancy test. St Bartholomew's Hospital is only able to use it in research projects and cannot perform it as a routine service. Indeed, such a service would be impossible for them to meet as they only have one person doing it one day a week. With the current financial situation it is unrealistic to expect the test to become widely available on the NHS. Pressure from the women's movement would no doubt have some effect, but if we concentrate our energies on the fundamental issue of adequate, non-guilt-inducing abortion facilities for all, the pressing need for such a test would disappear.

The test is, however, being offered by one commercial organisation (Belmont Laboratories, 188 Brent Crescent, London NW10, telephone 965 1477), and no doubt other firms will jump on the band-wagon in due course. Belmont charge £5, to help pay, it would seem, for the 'expensively-equipped laboratory and highly-trained staff' which they say is required. A

Belmont spokesman told me that for this reason, there will not be a new boom in pregnancy testing using this technique.

However, Prof Chard at St Bartholomew's thinks that the capital cost of setting up a service is minimal, and that an intelligent person would only need a week's training to learn how to do the test. At the outside £2,500 would be needed for equipment, but as most labs would already have most of the equipment, they would probably only have to spend another £800.

So, if at present you want to use the test, you will need to contact Belmont Laboratories and pay £5. You should specifically ask for the Conception test since they also do the normal test as well (for £3). You can ask them to send you a bottle for the urine sample or you can simply use your own container.

If you take the latter course, it is important that the bottle is clean and that there is no trace of soap or detergent in it; a contaminated bottle can result in a false-positive test. Some chemists also act as agents for Belmont's parent company, Pharmacy & Professional Services Ltd, and will supply you with bottles too. Results are sent by return, or can be given by telephone the afternoon following the day on which the sample is received. They prefer to be told beforehand if the result is to be requested by telephone.

Note Some agencies which do pregnancy testing can be inexperienced, unscrupulous, or both. A spokesman for Belmont was at pains to show how scrupulous they were, pointing out how they had been approached for

advice by a smaller firm (it was found that they were cleaning their bottles with washing-up liquid!). It is therefore wise to go to those who clearly do not have a vested interest.

Some women's liberation groups do pregnancy testing, usually for free or for a small donation. They clearly have no vested interest, and are concerned with providing women with reliable information both efficiently and speedily. The Bristol Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign Group (WACC) provides one such service for women in Bristol.

Family planning clinics do pregnancy testing which is free if you are already a client of theirs. One of the charitable agencies, BPAS (who advertise in *Spare Rib*) and Brook Advisory Service do free testing, while the London Pregnancy Advisory Service now has to charge £1.

Therefore it is clearly unnecessary to pay a commercial organisation for a pregnancy test when such facilities exist. However, if you are desperate to know as soon as possible, then it is probably worth paying £5 to Belmont Laboratories.

Since contraception, pregnancy testing and abortion facilities are not widely publicised, it is necessary for women to work together and help each other. If you are interested in making information or facilities more widely available, contact your local Women's Liberation or WACC group. The WACC newsletter is obtainable from Merseyside WACC, 49 Seel Street, Liverpool 1, at 50p for three issues.

Jill Rakusen

Any queries about this article should be sent to Medical News, *Spare Rib* 41

Best Sellers from Pathfinder Press

"Women in China" by Katie Curtin. 96pp. Paper 65p Cloth £2.50.

"Problems of Women's Liberation" by Evelyn Reed. 96pp. Paper 65p Cloth £1.95.

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"Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State" by Friedrich Engels. 192pp. Paper £1.00.

FROM GOOD BOOK SHOPS OR FROM
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900 support NAC conference

900 people attended the National Abortion Campaign Conference held in London on October 18/19.

They represented women's groups, Trade Union branches, trades councils, political organisations and local NAC groups — of which there are 85 in the country — and many individuals.

Often fraught but eventually productive, discussion revolved around the aims of the campaign, its structure and future action.

NAC will continue to be loosely structured to allow maximum participation and will fight for Free Abortion on Demand — A Woman's Right to Choose.

"It is clear from the votes for free abortion on request at the recent TUC and Labour Party conferences that this new position will be widely supported," NAC comments.

Meanwhile, handcuffed members of the Woman's Right to Choose Campaign appeared before Sunday morning mass in the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral demanding an end to Church interference.

There had been an appeal from the pulpit for the congregation to join the afternoon's anti-abortion demonstration organised by the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child.

The demonstrators only wanted "to stay a short time and make our point", and left after five minutes. □

Full report of NAC Conference next issue.



Handcuffed in Westminster Cathedral

£6 Policy and Equal pay

Despite wage control equal pay as defined by the Act must be implemented by 29 December 1975, writes Jean Gardiner.

The government has excluded wage increases in respect of equal pay from the £6 wage rise limit agreed with the TUC for the coming year.

From an article on Women and the Economic Crisis in the next issue of Red Rag, due out at the beginning of December. Send 20p plus postage to 9 Stratford Villas, London NW1.



Two views of the National Abortion Campaign Benefit Festival which took place on Tooting Common, South London on September 21. Over £600 was made, which NAC voted should go to the Abortion Law Reform Association after expenses had been met.

The festival comprised speakers — a feminist barrister, sympathetic male and female doctors, and representatives of NAC and ALRA — and musicians — Soft Machine, Kevin Coyne Band and folk singer A J Webber. However singer-songwriter Joan Armatrading, loved by feminists, didn't turn up. Other acts included Broadside Mobile Workers Theatre, a Tai Chi group, and poets Ivor Cutler and Phyllis April King. The first issue of NAC News sold well. □



1000 meet, discuss and sing at French-Spanish border

At the beginning of October a collective of French women's groups issued the following appeal in *Le Quotidien des Femmes* (The Women's Daily — an occasional women's liberation newspaper):

"Five men have just been murdered by Franco — Hitler and Mussolini's oldest ally. Today the arbitrary arrests are going on, today the military tribunals are organising more murders... women and men are still alive in the jails. By our strength, our will, our love, we will save them..."

On Sunday October 5 over 1000 women assembled at Hendaye-Ville near the border with Spain. Mostly from Paris and South-West France, women from Spain, Chile and other countries were also represented. Telegrams of support were sent

from Montreal, Sweden, Rome and many other places by women who could not attend.

In the morning women held discussions and sang, and one woman sang a Basque song she had especially written for the event.

Then they marched to the International Bridge which links the two countries, carrying banners: "Rape is Unrecognised Fascism", "Fascism is Permanent Rape", "Male Chauvinism is at the Root of Fascism". Some of the women sat down on the bridge, quietly blocking the route, and others unleashed balloons over the frontier bearing leaflets of protest.

On the same Sunday some 50 women, most of whom were Spanish, assembled outside the Spanish Embassy in London. We too sat and talked about the specific repression of women in Catholic and fascist Spain. Socially and legally Spanish women are considered servants of the men; and in an unrepenting police state this component oppression of women was to us a starting point in the general struggle against fascism.

The group has met since to organise its own activities as well as to co-ordinate with other

campaigns. Some of the women would like to talk with women, to explain the general situation in Spain, so little understood in this country. The group, at present called the Women's Campaign against Fascist Spain, can be contacted c/o the Women's Liberation Workshop, 38 Earlham Street, London WC2.

On November 27 Penguin Books are publishing *From a Spanish Jail*, a translation of the letters of Eva Forest, psychiatrist and one of the founders of the first assembly of the Spanish Democratic Women's Movement in 1970. She has been awaiting trial in jail for more than a year (see *Spare Rib* 38).

'Women leave no stone unturned'



JOHN STURROCK (REPORT)

Putuse Appolus, SWAPO

"Long live the suffering women of Africa, long live the struggling women of the world!"

Putuse Appolus of the Women's League of the South West African People's Organisation spoke to 180 people on September 24 in the National Union of Railwaymen's Hall in London. She started with a clenched fist and those slogans, almost dancing as she delivered them.

South West Africa is the old name for Namibia, a country to the north of South Africa, also bordering on Angola, Zambia and Botswana. From 1884 until the First World War it was administered by the Germans, who reduced the black population from 50,000 to 18,000. After the war it was mandated by the League of Nations to South Africa. "A pawn in the international game" Ms Appolus said, "it passed from one fascist regime to another."

In 1966 an international court

ruled that South Africa had no right to be in Namibia and must leave. Vorster refused to go. Since then S. Africa has been illegally occupying Namibia, the United Nations have been passing resolutions insisting that it leave — and SWAPO has been fighting for freedom.

Putuse Appolus spoke of the tortures, the floggings and the rapes in Namibia now. People are crying for peace, she said, but how can there be peace when the oppressed peoples of the world suffer such atrocities?

Today Vorster is playing a game of détente, and there is international pressure — black and white — on SWAPO to stop fighting and try peaceful negotiation. She wanted us to see that this was not possible — "How can you have a détente with a crocodile?"

"I am not a diplomat" she said. "I am a mother and a grandmother. I have to say what I have to say from the bottom of my heart." And so she criticised France, Britain and the US who, whatever they said on paper about S. Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia, still sold arms to S. Africa and still invested their money in S. Africa and Namibia, in the goldmines and factories (owned by the same multi-national companies as operate here).

"The money goes to the US, to Britain. We get nothing, only misery, disease, illiteracy. What can we do? We have to fight, and fight, we are going to do it."

Audrey Wise, Labour MP for Coventry West, who was chairing the meeting, had already referred to Portugal. Ms Appolus stressed that Portugal's colonies did not gain their independence by détente, but by hard armed struggle.

Even though British capital is largely responsible for the oppression of the Namibian people, she had come to Britain because "there are still a few great people in this Great Britain. There are still women."

She had come, she said, to speak to women, and to some men too, "who have the hearts of women". She felt that women, who give birth, have more feeling for life — "they can't stand by and see their sons and sisters slaughtered" — and that women are more tenacious, more thorough as freedom-fighters — "they leave no stone unturned." She asked women in Britain to put pressure on the government to put its policy into practice. She asked for support for SWAPO and for its education centre in Zamibia. □

Jill Nicholls
The Namibia Support Committee
can be contacted at 21/25
Tabernacle St., London EC2
(01-588 1878/9).

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USA: Lesbians and Third World women simmer

Liz Cooper spent this summer in the USA. Here she describes her response to the two-day National Socialist Feminist Conference held in July at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

It was exhausting, hilarious, friendly, exciting — in some ways just like a national women's conference in England.

Similar in that all the really good things happened outside the formal structure; that women became more and more alienated from the organisation and refused to follow the formal timetable; that new workshops and meetings were constantly being added. Similar too in the friendship, the laughter, the endless talk, the overcrowding and the almost total lack of sleep.

But very different too. After a registration night of unbelievable thunderstorms, when we were nearly flooded out, the power system broke down and the whole campus was lit by glittering fire flies (honest!) — the sun came out and shone brilliantly for three days.

Most of the conference happened outside under the trees and on the lawns. There were 1500 of us on a campus built for 900; we slept four or five to a room meant for two — on the floor, on mattresses, on bed springs, on chairs. We ate magnificently and frequently. The whole conference was so overcrowded that everything was in shifts — meals, plenaries, theatre shows, music — everybody did everything twice.

The conference was by and large very well organised by women from all over the States. There were goofs of course. I was on the registration desk at 5.30 am the first morning. Women had been arriving all

night in heavy rainstorms, from hundreds, sometimes thousands of miles away — soaked, exhausted, shattered but happy to be there. The organisers suddenly discovered that a whole block of rooms they had thought were available could not be used, and some women found themselves sleeping in the bathrooms.

Tacked On and Ripped Off?

It's hard to summarise the content and conclusions of the conference. I kept a journal while I was in the States and tried to keep it going every day. Perhaps I could quote a couple of paragraphs — it's a bit incoherent but at least immediate.

Saturday night, 2.30 am, July 5th (second day): "It hasn't been possible to write it all down — just can't deal with it! It all really happened today — the challenges, the arguments, the anger, the nitty gritty of any conference. Both lesbians and Third World women were simmering yesterday, and rightly. They felt tacked on, and worse, ripped off because on the surface it looked like the conference was designed not only to include discussion on these issues but as an integral part.

"It wasn't. The organisation was middle class white heterosexual 'politically' active women; it showed and was today attacked (at last — can't help feeling in London it would have been attacked quicker) — but not with a great deal of coherence. I skipped one lot of 'formal' stuff to go to an ad hoc lesbian caucus on what was happening to some women at the conference. It never really connected but was a lot more open and exciting than the 'straight' stuff.

Sunday night: "It's all over. The socialist analysis was classic, given in long boring plenaries to begin with, very repetitive although under different names eg Theory Session, Strategic Workshop; Economy Panel — some of it highpowered and academic. The deadly heavy Marxist Leninist Third World Caucus minds gone by dogma — closed, reactionary, frightening — screaming at one of their group who wouldn't toe the party line.

(She wanted to make a personal statement and apparently it was agreed she could. However when she got up to speak they howled her down. About 100 of us moved away from the formal platform to listen to her and several members of her group tried to break up even *that* meeting.)

"The Indian woman who spoke twice about Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and the extermination of the Indian, spoke off the cuff, directly, found I was



OFF OUR BACKS, WASHINGTON DC

"Joanne is free, Joanne is free", shouted a crowd of supporters outside the Wake County Courthouse after a jury of six whites and six Blacks arrived at the 'not guilty' verdict on August 15.

The "evidence" so patently failed to link Little to a plan to kill jailer Clarence Alligood that Judge Hamilton Hobgood threw out the first-degree murder charge when the state presented its case on August 6.

"I knew that if the people stood together", Little said after the verdict, "we would win." □

crying. Charlotte Bunch in a strong precise speech on the heterosexual problem; funny, informative, clear.

"Cultural workshops with a heavy emphasis on integrating 'culture with politics' — in which we finally talked to each other in small groups. The bookstalls, the phenomenal amount of literature, the music, the songs, the dancing and the beer van in the evenings under the trees; the whistles hanging up in the shower rooms — I'll never sort it all out!"

This is Not a Toy

I should explain the whistles. They were provided by the conference organisers and one hung in each shower room above a notice saying: 'This is not a toy — use it to call for help'. There were notices all over the campus warning us to stay together, not to walk alone at night, to avoid certain areas entirely, to treat any man with suspicion. (There were in fact men on the campus working in the child care section and in the canteen.)

The emphasis on the danger of rape was extreme to me, although I had been in the States six weeks and had come to realise that the generalised fear and anger were appropriate enough given the high incidence of rape throughout the country. Joanne Little's trial was about to start in Raleigh and the women's movement was deeply involved.

(Joanne Little, a black prisoner, was charged with murdering the prison guard who raped her. The case had involved masses of women and seemed to create new links between black and white women. I found that when I wore the Joanne Little button, black women spoke to me spontaneously. A black woman on the Staten Island Ferry in New York, for example, asked me about Joanne Little and we talked all the way across.)

I had learned to feel afraid, even in daylight, on empty streets. But even so, I somehow felt that a college campus overcrowded with 1500 women was a pretty safe place. That was certainly not the general feeling. There were patrols all through the night and we were told not to be alone in any of the buildings. When I mentioned that I had met a man in my block about to take a shower, three women took off rapidly in the direction of the block.

It is a much more tense situation, and the confrontation between men and women more out front — for example men don't necessarily want to pick you up, they just want to hassle you. One man stopped me on the street in Berkeley and asked me the way to a theatre. I said I was sorry but I didn't know the area and he replied, "Oh, thank you very much, I bet you've got a big vagina" — but I can't help hoping that here, somehow, we will avoid that level of fear and anger and consequent reaction.

S. Africa plans glittering jamboree

Reports have come in of an International Conference of Eminent Women to be held in Grahamstown, South Africa, on December 3. Sponsored by the 1820 Settlers Association, the conference has been condemned by novelist Nadine Gordimer as "a glittering jamboree that will hide reality".

Patrons are said to include UK Tory leader Margaret Thatcher but South Africa's Black Sash, a long-established organisation of white women against apartheid, has not been invited.

South Africans in London are determined to fight this conference. "Oh — they'll get some black women to participate — the wives of heads of the Bantustan states", commented one. □

We pledge ourselves to agitate and organise to achieve the following aims:

1. The rate for the job, regardless of sex, at rates negotiated by the trade unions, with a national minimum wage below which no wages should fall.
2. Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and in promotion, regardless of sex and marital state.
3. Equal education and training for all occupations and compulsory day release for all 16-19 year olds in employment.
4. Working conditions to be, without deterioration of previous conditions, the same for women as for men.
5. The removal of all legal and bureaucratic impediments to equality eg, with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, control over children, social security payments, hire-purchase agreements.
6. Improved provision of local authority day nurseries, free of charge, with extended hours to suit working mothers. Provision of nurseries with day classes. More nursery schools.
7. 18 weeks maternity leave with full net pay before and after the birth of a live child; 7 weeks after birth if the child is stillborn. No dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave. No loss of security, pension or promotion prospects.
8. Family planning clinics supplying free contraception to be extended to cover every locality. Free abortion to be readily available.
9. Family allowance to be increased to £2.50 per child, including the first child.
10. To campaign among women to take an active part in the trade unions and in political life so that they may exercise influence commensurate with their numbers and to campaign among men trade unionists that they may work to achieve this aim.

WORKING WOMENS CHARTER: 'Not just a paper document'

Women comprise 28% of all industrial workers and 43% of all service workers. Over the last year Trades Union Congress membership has risen by 340,000 to a total of 10.3 million — and almost half the new members are women. There are now just under three million women in unions.

"But when it comes to a branch meeting, a weekend school or a national con-

ference, where are they?" asks the Working Women's Charter Campaign.

The Working Women's Charter was first put forward at a London Trades Council meeting on women in March 1974. Since then women all over the country have set up groups to promote its ten aims, and twelve unions have adopted it at their national conference. The Charter was also

debated at September's Trades Union Congress in Blackpool.

After only eighteen months of campaigning, the Working Women's Charter hit the national news with a debate at the TUC.

Two motions on the Charter were put forward. The Society of Civil Servants motion simply urged Congress to give support to the WWC and outlined in full the ten demands. This was amalgamated with a motion from the Civil and Public Services Association, and so the

final motion continued:

"Congress instructs the General Council to press the government for the early adoption and implementation of the Charter, and to give support wherever possible to any individual union or group of unions involved in industrial action which is in pursuit of the aims covered by the Charter."

A leaflet explaining the difference between the WWC and the TUC Charter of Twelve Aims for Women at Work was distributed free to the delegates, together with a copy of *Voice of the Unions* whose centre-spread concentrated on the WWC. The TUC Charter, first published in

1963 and "revised to bring it into line with the needs of today" — particularly those of International Women's Year — does not include demands for free, safe and reliable contraception or for free abortion on demand when contraception fails.

These are "only two demands", said women campaigning against James White's Abortion (Amendment) Bill at the time of the Women's TUC in March, "but they are demands which vitally affect a woman's ability to work, to stay at school or college, to take training courses, to get promotion."

The leaflet for the Blackpool TUC said that "perhaps the main reason why we call on you to support the Working Women's Charter is that, unlike the TUC Charter, it is not just a paper document. It has an active campaign promoting it. Trade unionists and men and women in other organisations throughout the labour movement are already using it to fight together for improved conditions for women."

Additions Not Amendments
The debate on the Charter came on the second morning of Congress and was described as the main debate of the day. The motion was proposed by Campbell Christie of the SCS and seconded by the CPSA.

Mr Christie said that the motion did not seek to amend the Twelve Aims of the TUC, but to add certain other important items. He pointed out that as two-thirds of women working were not protected by the Equal Pay Act, there was a need for a national minimum wage, below which women's wages could not fall.

He stressed that the unions had to fully involve themselves before equality could become a reality. The WWC bridged the artificial gap between the economic/educational aspects and the social aspects.

Seconding the motion, Jeannie Drake (CPSA) said that the Charter should serve as a basis for a campaign of implementation. She was concerned that we should campaign amongst men to wage a joint campaign.

Making a point that we in the WWC have emphasised, she said that Point 9 of the TUC Charter left traditional attitudes unchallenged: "Employers must accept the need for women to work the hours which will enable them to meet their commitments as mothers or to assist them to care for their elderly dependents."

There were many women speakers in the 35-minute debate. Audrey Prime of NALGO, one of two women on the General Council — the other

being Marie Patterson, who chaired the Congress — spoke for the General Council against the motion. In reference to Clause 1 of the WWC she said that a national minimum wage concerned men as well as women and should not be dealt with at Congress as a clause of a woman's charter.

She also thought that many unions might think that free abortion and contraception should not be included in a charter for all women. (It should be noted that the TUC General Council were not so solicitous about the views of the unions opposed to the £6 pay policy!)

With reference to Clause 4 she said that if taken literally, Part 6 of the Factories Act would have to be repealed. Finally, the last paragraph of the motion required the General Council to give "blanket support" to industrial action arising from the efforts to secure the demands. Industrial action was, she said, a matter for the individual unions and not for Congress.

We Had Our Supporters

We did, however, have our supporters at the TUC. S R Broadbridge (ATTI) asked trade unionists to accept that adequate creche and nursery facilities must be provided at trade union conferences. Rita

Donaghy (NALGO) put her finger on the problem when she asked why the General Council were calling for rejection of the WWC.

Among other things, she asked, was it because the motion's Clause 10 pledged Congress to run an effective campaign for women to achieve commensurate influence in the trade unions and in political life? Was it that we were prepared to give lip-service to the idea of equality, but to draw back when action was required?

A card vote resulted in the motion being lost by 3,697,000 votes to 6,224,000. Unions voting for the Working Women's Charter included NALGO, CPSA, SCS, NUPE and the four sections of the AUEW — TASS, Foundry, Constructional and Engineering.

It Is Up To Us

There are many points to be made about this debate and the vote. Several things are immediately obvious:

1) The reasons advanced against the TUC supporting the Charter clearly do not stand up to close examination. The majority of the General Council appear not to understand that the struggle of women workers must be the concern of the whole labour movement. It is up to us and

those who supported us at the Congress to show them by action that we are not prepared to accept their arguments.

2) One third of the votes went in our favour. But what does that mean? We have seen that unions are prepared to pass the Charter at their national conferences, but not necessarily to back action for the demands. NALGO actually passed the Charter at its national conference, yet Audrey Prime, a NALGO officer, actually made the main speech against the Charter.

We must use the fact that union delegates supported the Charter at the TUC to wage a campaign inside those unions for its implementation. And we must work on those unions which opposed it, from the grass roots level, to build support for the demands of the Charter and to force the Executives to back the struggle of their members for the demands. □

Newsletter Committee,
London WWC Campaign

Starting next month: regular news from the Working Women's Charter Campaign up and down the country.

This article is reprinted from the Third London Newsletter of the Working Women's Charter Campaign. Copies available from Flat 4, 20 Queen's Gardens, London W2.



A corner of an exhibition held during September in Hackney Town Hall to commemorate 75 Years of Brotherhood — Hackney Trades Council 1900—1975. The exhibition included a section of photographs of women at work in Hackney against a background of national statistics on inequality (reviewed in next Spare Rib).

A comments book brought forth remarks like "I really enjoyed myself — I'm asking for a rise in my pay! — not enough free leaflets, not bad — interesting and very good — very bad".

Many school parties came to the exhibition. Three 15-year-old girls from a local secondary school recognised familiar faces and read out the statistics to each other. "We often talk about the roles of men and women in society — though the boys don't want to. The boys are too babyish. We'll talk about it when we get back to school." □

NEWS

ITALIAN DOCTOR: I DON'T TALK TO BITCHES WHO WANT TO MAKE LOVE WITHOUT HAVING CHILDREN

The estimated three million illegal abortions a year in Italy outnumber the sum of live births. Rosalind Carne reports on problems facing the country's abortion and contraception campaign.

Italy: where 120,000 women die or are made permanently sterile every year after the horrors of a back street abortion. Where only 17 per cent of women work outside the home. Where, until recently, men had the legal privilege of beating their wives.

Italy is a country where homosexuality among men is regarded as a mild aberration and among women as a monstrosity; a country which, after Portugal, has the highest child mortality rate in Europe; where there is no easily available contraception, no national health, and no sex education.

But Italian women are coming together. Groups have sprung up in all the major cities to fight the oppression women have suffered for centuries. The marxist feminist Lotta Femminista is a national organisation and one of the biggest.

In Rome alone there are five principal feminist groups: the radical feminist MFR (Movimento Femminista Romano); the extra-parliamentary communist Collettivo Comunista Femminista; the MLD (Movimento di Liberazione delle Donne), aligned to the extra-parliamentary Radical Party; Rivolta Femminile, a separatist group; and La Maddalena, which could be compared to our Women in Media and covers the feminist library and bookshop.

All these groups, and particularly the MLD, are currently working with CISA, an Information Centre for Sterilisation and Abortion, on what — through dire necessity — has come to be one of the principal campaigns of the movement.

From Fascism to the Courts
In February this year the Italian Constitutional Court ruled that

abortion could be legal whenever doctors determine that pregnancy is a serious threat to the physical or psychological health of the mother.

Until this ruling no abortions were legal. The 1930 Fascist law, Crimes Against The Integrity And Health Of The Race, still calls for two to five years imprisonment for persons performing abortion on consenting women and for the women themselves.

The decision of the Constitutional Court is an improvement but Italian feminists, knowing the attitudes prevalent among doctors, wonder how strictly it will be interpreted.

When Effe asked a prominent Roman doctor to give his opinions on the abortion question he replied over the telephone: "I don't talk to bitches who want to make love without having children."

Like their English counterparts the National Abortion Campaign, CISA are asking that women should have the right to choose. Their immediate struggle is for almost any liberalisation in a law that causes so much unnecessary death and suffering. Their long term aims are for free abortion on demand.

"Abortion should be a matter between a woman and her doctor and should cost nothing and be freely available" ("L'Aborto deve essere concordato liberamente fra la donna e il suo medico e deve essere libero an e gratuito"). The words are Adele Faccio's, president of CISA and MLD, in her introduction to the booklet put out by CISA *Aborto Facciamolo da Noi* (Abortion, Let's Do It Ourselves).

The emphasis on ourselves is two-edged. On the one hand Italian women see the need for a broader political struggle. But in a country like Italy the immediate and pressing need for self-help is much more than a liberal cop-out. CISA, while working closely with women's liberation groups for a change in the law, also operate a clandestine abortion service, charging approximately £70 for an



Posters from the 1974 Italian divorce referendum on show at Central London Polytechnic during October. In order to retain the 1971 law permitting divorce one had to vote No. Top Row: Say yes again against divorce (left); I'm looking for a husband who believes in the family and not in divorce (right). Bottom row: They are symbols of love not rings of a chain (left); Free to stay united (right).

abortion in one of their own clinics. The charge is frequently waived where the woman is unable to pay.

Even so, according to one of the women I spoke to, many male doctors are making a fortune out of the feminists. What is needed are more women qualified to perform the operation themselves. As yet they number very few.

Referendum Next Year?

Nor are the CISA women very optimistic about the prospects for changing the legal situation. The campaign has gathered 750,000 signatures from Italian voters calling for a referendum to abolish the anti-abortion laws. The petitions have been deposited at the referendum office of Italy's Court of Cassation.

When at least 500,000 of the signatures have been authenticated, the government will have

to call a national referendum next year between April and June. But the CISA women fear the government may side-track the issue by a slight modification in the law, thereby avoiding the holding of a referendum.

The present Christian Democrat ruling party, many of whose members are ex-Fascists, is closely aligned with the Roman Catholic church. Attempts to change the abortion laws have not been welcomed. However, there does seem to have been a move leftwards politically in Italy, even though the Communist Party's gains in the recent regional elections do not have the significance suggested in some of the English newspapers. In Italy's unsteady political climate, the dissolution of parliament before a consideration of the referendum result would be another way of shelving the issue.

Safe, free abortion is just one

of the basic rights for which Italian women must struggle. Another is contraception. In some parts of Italy and for many poor women, this is so hard to obtain that clandestine abortion by the local "mammanna" is seen as a perfectly acceptable alternative.

Recently, one woman from Calabria told a social researcher that after having learnt how it was done from the "mammanna", she then carried out no fewer than 37 abortions — all on herself. Adele Faccio reports that as many as a quarter of the women who come to the CISA clinics for abortion are married with five or six children.

Fighting the Here and Now
The archaic situation of women in Italy means that much of the energy of the women's movement is taken up with fighting individual issues. The here and now becomes of over-riding importance.

The recently introduced Family Law was a pretty moderate piece of legislation — but a glance at some of its clauses show just how backward Italy still is. The law provides for equal responsibility between husband and wife in the upbringing of children.

Previously, the husband was

their sole guardian and could even appoint a further special guardian from outside the immediate family to give orders to his widow in the event of his death.

The new law also gives women the right to take paternity proceedings against the fathers of illegitimate children. Given the nagging insistence of our social security system that women contact the father of any illegitimate child even if she doesn't want to, the contrast is ironic. But then Italy has no social security and economic independence for an unmarried mother is a near impossibility.

The law also provides for joint administration of property between husband and wife and allows for the wife to inherit a full title, not just a life interest.

Whether or not these laws will actually be enforced remains to be seen. Will the women who need their protection be aware of them, and if they are, will they have the courage to withstand their husbands and demand their rights? Some left parties may regard these provisions as reformist, but their importance on paper at this stage need hardly be stressed. As one Sicilian woman put it, "My husband is old and my son has

already told me that I will be confined to one room in the house when the property is his." Christian Democrat Deputy Maria Eletta Martini describes the faces of men who listen to her explanatory lectures as "pretty grim".

It seems the Italian male can bear women in top jobs. They are outside the home and therefore not really to be counted as women. But at home his wife is his property and he will resist any attempt at change. The Italian woman's reaction of subtly pressurising her children in order to exercise power has developed out of this situation — a type of matriarchy which, for centuries, has been her only form of defence.

We Talk and Talk and Talk

But the Italian women's movement is not, and does not wish to be confined to issue politics. Most Italian women are still in the home — they are hard to reach and hard to organise. The unions are notoriously male-dominated. Perhaps this is why the Wages For Housework campaign has been particularly strong in Italy.

When there is a lull in the almost constant struggle, the women can concentrate on

political discussion. Adele Cambria, writer, theatre director and one-time journalist on *Effe* explained some of the problems the movement faces: "We talk and talk and talk and talk," she said, "and what seems important now is to end the power struggles, political and private, and the terrible rivalry between many of the women."

Were there any working class women involved in the movement? I asked. Very few it seems. But collecting signatures for the abortion referendum gave an excellent opportunity of talking to women outside the movement. MLD report that some women who come to CISA for help with abortion later join the group and move on to broadening the issue. But most just want abortions and have neither the time nor the interest in relating that struggle to the central question of women's oppression.

And for those who do grasp the connections, change must necessarily threaten the guiding patterns of their lives. Italian women have a long fight before them. As Adele Cambria explained: "Abortion, contraception — these things take up so much time. But what we want is not emancipation, but liberation." □

SISTERS

If you are an engineering staff worker

JOIN TASS

The staff section of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers

If you oppose sex discrimination in jobs, in pay, in opportunity

JOIN TASS

Don't let the employers organise you out of equal pay and equal opportunities. Legislation will not be enough.

YOU NEED ORGANISATION NEGOTIATION

As well as legislation.

Write for application, or organise a meeting.

Contact: Judith Hunt, National Womens Officer, Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, Technical Administrative and Supervisory Section, Onslow Hall, Little Green, Richmond, Surrey.



CLASSIFIEDS

COURSES

IMAGES OF WOMEN: Weekly course on women and literature (19th and 20th century). Holloway Institute, Eden Grove, N7. 7.30-9.30. Wednesdays. For more details ring Jean Radford 609-0682

PERSONAL

MARRIED FEMALE BISEXUAL 21 (non-children) would like sincere pen-friend, similar circumstances, any area. Box no.415

Photodates. S.A.E. to Dent S.R., 29 Westfields Avenue, London SW13

Teacher, 32, seeks female company. Very much the Pierre type in War and Peace — as far as thinking — though more aggressive in personality. Never able to re-adjust after broken affair. Strong feminist supporter. Generally cover up despair at life with acute sense of humour. Respond to extrovert women more, who are confident and self-assured, as I am not, but must be compassionate and very feminine. London. Box no.411.

GAY professional girl needs to meet similar in West/Central Scotland, Box No.405

Female/female exclusive introductions highly confidential service for release, friendship liberation etc. SAE — 'Lesbos and Ariadne', The Golden Wheel, Liverpool L15 3HT

RECORDS

Three really good records from the US. "Hang in There" and "Holly Near" by Holly Near and "Working People Gonna Rise" by Bev Grant and the Human Condition. £2.50 post paid from String Records, 33 Brunswick Gdns, London W8 4AW. Send SAE for details of other records available.

BOOKS ETC

Rising Free, left-wing bookshop. 197 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1. Large selection of radical women's literature with mail order service. Including: VD HANDBOOK 8p, PAMPHLET OF THE FIRST WOMEN AND HEALTH CONFERENCE SHEFFIELD 15p, CIRCLE ONE, a woman's guide to self health and sexuality 80p.

RESEARCH MATERIAL ON WOMAN AND SOCIETY. Enquire for specialist catalogues. TARA BOOKS LTD, Shortacre Park Rd, Winchester, Hants. Winchester 2239.

SAPPHO, the only lesbian feminist magazine in Europe, 40p inc post, 39 Wardour St, London W1V 3HA. Meetings held every Tuesday 7.30pm upstairs room, The Chepstow Pub, Chepstow Place, London W2, off Westbourne Grove 40p admission for non-subscribers.

Please send a large stamped envelope with all replies to Box numbers.

New Design WL Badge 14p (incl. postage). Stop Rape American pamphlet on self-defence for women (illustrated) 26p (incl. postage) from Sisterhood Books c/o 22 Great Windmill St, London W1

Anti-Apartheid News, Journal of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The only newspaper devoted to reporting the facts of the situation in Southern Africa, and the campaigns being waged internationally against white supremacy. Ten issues per year, annual subscription rates £1.35 UK from 89 Charlotte St, London W1P 2DQ

FOR GAY WOMEN: THE GIRL'S GUIDE 1975. The all new, pocket size, discreet, international bar/club guide and complete directory: organisations, centres, publications etc. All Britain plus 25 other countries. 1500 listings. £1.00 only from: The Girl's Guide, 103 Hammersmith Rd, London W14 (mail order only). Also at: Compendium, 240 Camden High St, NW1; Sterling's Bookshop, 57 St Martin's Lane, WC2; Marmac Books, 56 Gloucester Rd, SW7. And on sale at the SAPPHO discos.

Nuclear weapons still threaten every- one—keep in touch with latest developments by reading CND's newspaper SANITY. 10p a copy or £1 a year. Write to CND, Eastbourne House, Bullards Place, London E2

MOVE Publication Bristol Gay Women's Liberation Sample 20p Women's Centre, 11 Waverley Rd, Redland, Bristol

TIME OUT SHORT STORY COMPETITION. We are sponsoring a competition to find original fiction suitable for publication in TIME OUT. If you would like to enter a short story about some aspect of 'living in London' see the Print Section of this week's TIME OUT for full details. Closing date December 1.

ACCOMMODATION

Comfortable Victorian house Nth London has vacancy suitable for woman and young child (maybe two) Other applicants considered. £10pw. 727-0759

People seek others to buy outright share large house in South London. Must have/be able to borrow approx. £2,500 for own room/share communal living space and garden Box no 341

Modernised pied a terre WC1 semi-basement bedsitter (wall bed, fitted carpets curtains etc) bathroom, kitchen/pantry overlooking plant area. Leasehold 36 years £8,750. Enquiries 01-278 1501

ACCOM. WANTED

Student mother, two school-aged daughters (American) requires large room or small flat near Chiswick Rd Acton London. January, February, March. Consider exchange 3 bedroom house Wisconsin USA. Phone 01-267 8468.

Could we help each other? Female having helped organize projects for peace and children for 17 years needs roof in country (or space for small caravan), worthwhile part-time job (gardening, cooking, child-loving) and space to be with like-minded vegetarian companions. Box no.416.

Quiet, middle-aged Englishman requires room/flatlet anywhere greater London. Box no.413.

CAREERS WORKER seeks friendly place within 15 miles Accrington, January onwards. Own room essential Allergic to damp or mouldering dwellings. Could pay deposit or retainer. Box no.408.

EDINBURGH, Central student wishes to share, own room necessary. Please phone Ariel Falkirk 24221.

GROUPS

WORKING WOMEN'S CHARTER CAMPAIGN London Newsletter available bi-monthly. £1.00 annual sub or 10p + s.a.e. to W.W.C.C. 49 Lowther Hill, SE23 1P2. General meetings every 6-8 weeks. Convenor 01-928 4195. For the whereabouts of your local group write or ring 01-690 5518.

MIDDLESBROUGH CHE welcomes women to mixed meetings, Wednesdays. Women only meetings arranged for 10 November Telling Parents 8 December Sappho tape — Kim Friele, Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon — 7.30, 93 Abingdon Rd, Middlesbrough. For further information contact Marion England, 13 Abingdon Rd.

Capital study group wanted Sth. or Cen. London women only preferably. Daytime or Wed pm. Contact Nina Hutchinson 26 Talfourd Rd, SE15. Tel 701-5601

SECONDARY SCHOOL teachers interested in forming group to work in area of integrated studies concerned with sexism racism and class-bias and ageism (early years of secondary) please contact Scilla Alvarado 01-602 5859, 98b Sinclair Rd, W14

We are starting a Women's Centre in Worthing and we need help/advice. Please ring Bobby at Worthing 66125 or write to Ena, at 31 Clive Ave, Goring-by-Sea.

Homosexual/Bisexual women join the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. CHE is your voice—make it louder! Meetings and socials throughout Britain. Send SAE 9 x 4" to CHE (332), 28 Kennedy St, Manchester 2

JOBS

Two women for Counter Act socialist community media group. Experience /interest in some of: agit prop, drama, music, photography, printing, video. London-based; work (2/3 workshops, 1/3 performance) nationally with tenants/community/student action groups. £25 pw (gross). Apply by November 30th. 175a Kentish Town Rd, London NW1 (267-5059).

JOBS WANTED

Female graduate (21), degree predominantly in civil rights, seeks interesting full-time job, London area. Experienced typist. Preferably feminist environment. Box no.412.

WANTED

See Red Women's Workshop want any pictures of women — old (family) photos, sexist adverts, postcards, etc., for our collection, which is available to anyone concerned with Women's Liberation. Send to Suzie Mackie, 5 Larkhall Rise, SW4.

WORCESTER: People with small capital wanted to start urban commune. Box no.414.

BOMBSHELL POP GROUP with explosive future require illuminated financial backer to light the fuse. Paul: 01-658 4386 (daytime).

THERAPY

PSYCHOTHERAPY: A group of therapists (of both sexes and including Freudians Jungians and existentialists) has vacancies for individuals or couples at reasonable rates. Free initial interview. 01-935 9666.

PRIMAL THERAPY write Jenny James, Atlantis, Burtonport, Letterkenny, Co Donegal, Eire

Woman psychotherapist (Jungian) now has vacancies in Highgate area. Tel: 01-348 5593 before 10 a.m.

THERAPY & COUNSELLING AT NO COST. The Family Welfare Association is an independent agency offering therapy and counselling to individuals, couples and families, living or working in the Boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea or Westminster. Because it is supported by central and local government there is no fee. All the staff are fully qualified. If you would like skilled help with an emotional problem or simply want to know more about yourself then write or phone for an initial appointment to: FWA, 8 Kensington Park Road, W11. Tel: 727-6683/4.

If you want to join or start a group, find work, a travel companion, or a missing friend, start a household or share a house, have something to sell or swap . . . then run your own Classified Ad.

Copy date: December 3 for January 14

Please send a large stamped envelope with all replies to Box numbers.

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Underline any words you require in caps.

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Info..Odds & Sods..Advice

Media protest group

We have started a group designed to protest (by letter, phone or in person) to all aspects of the media concerning specific cases of sexism or offensive representation of homosexuals. We intend to form a telephone chain so that we could jam the switchboards of say the BBC or ITV with complaints if and when necessary. We desperately need women to support us. If you are interested please phone either Anne 01-485 2799 or Josette 01-340 2596.

Grants and Marriage

A few months ago I joined a musical group and in order for one of the musicians to legally stay in the country (as he was Australian) we decided on a marriage of convenience. I have since left the group to pursue musical studies and in my application for an independent full grant I must state that I am married. I believe that this will severely hamper my chances of obtaining one.

I am now living in a different part of the country and to divorce him I assume that he will be compelled to leave the country. Also, I eventually wish to settle in Australia, and being married to an Aussie would facilitate this opportunity.

Do you think that I can obtain a full grant in my present situation? If not could you please advise me.

I am a gay 24 year old and have no intentions of being supported by him.
Yours sincerely
Ms Josefine Cupido
Sussex

*Grants are discretionary and entirely dependent on the local authority. If your request for a full grant is tied to need, that is, if you can prove that you are separated, unsupported, and that your marriage has not been consummated, you stand a good chance of obtaining a full grant.

Contraceptive pill effects

Five years ago I was prescribed the contraceptive pill Norinyl, and I took it for one month. I then developed a condition called Stein-Levanthal syndrome, which meant that the ovaries were covered with cysts and the periods stopped. I was most distressed by the fact that my

face was very swollen.

I had an operation which repaired the ovaries, and when the periods returned, my surgeon was satisfied that there was nothing more to be done.

I have since been given various diuretic pills, but my face has never returned to normal.

I feel more and more isolated by this illness, because I have had so little information about it, because I have never met anyone else who has had it, and because this face does not reflect my own identity, I feel trapped behind it.

If anyone has any knowledge of this illness I would love to hear from them.

Yours sincerely
Susan Goulden
12 Ossulton Way
London N2

Research on the subject of Bisexuality

Dr Charlotte Wolff is preparing an extensive study of bisexuality. She would greatly appreciate it if both women and men who consider themselves to be bisexual would write to her at 10 Redcliffe Place, London SW10 9DD. She would then get in touch to give further information and arrange interviews.



Mortgages

I have recently come into some money as a result of compensation for a car accident. I would like to invest in a co-ownership scheme or buy my way into a tenants' co-operative.

I would like to know if you can recommend any building societies or similar organisations which offer single women favourable terms.
Yours faithfully
Nikki Pattison

*Most building societies these days seem to have an enlightened attitude and claim to offer single women mortgages on the same terms as they would to single men. But policies vary from one region to another, and the decision as to who gets mortgages and on what terms are usually made by the local branch branch managers. So it's really a question of shopping around. The same discretionary policy applies to local authorities.

Sterilisation on the NHS

I wonder if anyone can suggest where I could go for financial help to pay for a sterilisation. I have tried for eight months to get one on the NHS but the consultants in York have refused as I am only 25 and I've only had one child. The one child has shown me that I haven't an ounce of motherly instinct in me. I am at present waiting for my divorce, very involved with York Women's Aid and a group of one parent families, and hope to go back to college next year. The last thing I want right now is another pregnancy. In fact I never want another child.

The only people who have taken me seriously are the BPAS in Leeds but they want £85, and I simply haven't got that kind of money. Is there any charitable organisation who might help? Does anyone know of other ways to obtain a sterilisation without having to pay that much. At present I am managing on £10.95 supplementary benefit. I can't take the pill, my body rejects the coil and I'm allergic to all the various chemical forms of contraception.

If you can think of anything please let me know.
Yvonne Arnold
York

*The first thing you have to do is to get a recommendation from your own GP which refers you to a hospital. If he/she is unsympathetic it will be necessary to change your GP. However, even if you do get a favourable letter from your GP you can still be turned down at the hospital stage. This appears to have happened in York, and the most likely reason for it is your age and the fact that you only have one child.

What you could do next is to try hospitals in places other than York, but this will probably take time and a lot of patience and determination on your part in justifying your case.

There is another possibility which seems to be more promising. I talked to the Marie Stopes Clinic in London and I was assured that the majority of the cases that came to them were accepted for NHS sterilisation. The cases are considered on their own merit and there are no specific age stipulations.

The initial consultation fee is £5 and if you are accepted you will be referred to a London teaching hospital. Write direct

to the clinic to arrange an appointment. Their address is Marie Stopes Memorial Clinic, 108 Whitfield Street, London W1.

I hope you are successful.

Country Women

I wonder how many women who who read *Spare Rib* are living in quite isolated situations in the countryside or in small rural towns, where there are no women's groups, and where it is hard to meet other women who might want to start a group.

Over a year ago now, at the National Women's Liberation Conference at Edinburgh, a group of us met to talk about the particular situation of women living in the country, and to try to work out ways of making and maintaining contact with each other. We felt this need both to struggle against isolation and, more positively, to work on building our strength as a part of the women's movement with a particular contribution to make as country women.

One thing that came out of this meeting was a country women's newsletter, which has now had four issues. It is sent out to 70 or 80 women all over the country from Caithness to Devon, Wales and the west coast of Ireland. Through it we are trying to grow a shared dialogue about our experiences of living in the country, about rural politics and about practical things like keeping chickens and collecting wild food. We've had poems, recipes, stories and articles. Each issue we duplicate the complete list of country women's addresses so that people can contact other women who live near them.

We need more country women - and if you live in a town or city that's fine too - both to subscribe to the newsletter and to write things for it. If you want to subscribe or contribute please send £1 for as many issues as that will cover, to Alison and Juliet, 117 Manor Rd, Woodstock, Oxford. They are doing the next issue. And if you send me a couple of 5½p stamps I'll send you the copy of the previous issue.

With sisterhood and love

Mary Lewis
'Dumb Toms'
Ingleton
Carnforth
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As the first company to introduce vibrators into the U.K. and having sold some hundred of thousands, we feel that we know more about them and their use than most.

The most important thing to remember is, **that they do work** — providing the woman has no violent prejudice against the use of artificial sexual stimulation. Some women find the shape off-putting. The phallic symbolism, deliberately created by the makers to emphasize its sexual usage, gives them the impression that it is meant to be used as an artificial penis, and indeed it can and is so used. Some women, however, find the effect — when used in this way — to be more numbing than stimulating.

The vibrator is designed and is far more effective when used for clitoral stimulation and its undoubted value for this purpose has been well established by Masters and Johnson in their book "An Analysis of Human Sexual Response." In the book they describe how, using a similar device, they were able to bring to orgasm women who have never before reached a climax.

These were extreme cases obviously. Normally, the vibrator is used to provide extra stimulation during love making and is particularly useful where the woman's response tends to be slow. And, of course, it is just as often used purely for personal pleasure.

Finally a word about quality. There are many different makes on the market today, all of similar design, ranging in quality from very good to absolutely useless. We have been selling the same model for seven years and have enough confidence in it to offer you our special 'money refund' service if you are not satisfied.

If you want to experiment with your own personal vibrator, just complete the coupon below.

Please send me a Harmony Personal Vibrator.
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Prostitutes JEREMY SANDFORD

Few of us are prepared to face the problem of prostitution for what it really is, to admit the problem and to confront its implications. This ostrich attitude leads to a great deal of unhappiness, and opens the way for exploitation both of prostitutes themselves and of their clients. How far does this extortion spread? How many people are involved? How should a balanced society treat the vendors of instant sex... or the buyers?

These are some of the central questions Jeremy Sandford sets out to deal with in this refreshing and clear-sighted book.

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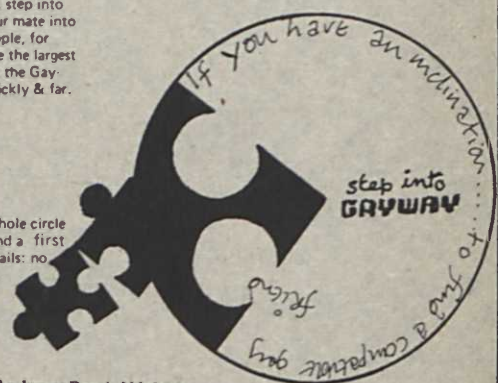
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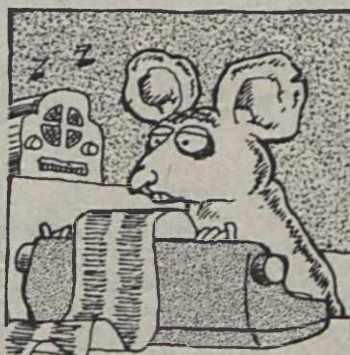
To join us, send £10 membership, a letter all about you & what makes you tick, & before you know it, you'll have increased your chances of finding who you're looking for.

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WOMEN & WORK A DOCUMENT ON THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN INDUSTRY

By Kay Hunt: Mary Kell
Margaret Harrison

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womens studies: success and failure

by Jill Liddington

I've taught a Women's Studies course in north Manchester for two terms now. About a dozen of us have been meeting each Thursday evening since Christmas at the Abraham Moss Centre — and afterwards in the nearest pub — to talk about women and work, politics, films or whatever.

The spring and summer terms were very different; the first term was successful, the second a relative failure. I decided to write this article because it might help other women interested in doing something similar to share some of the good things and avoid some of the pitfalls.

The first term worked as well as it did because of the immediacy of the topics on the syllabus (see below). We were a dozen articulate women coming together completely fresh to exchange common ideas and experiences. We had all come to the course from different directions. I'd read an article in *The Guardian* about Women's Studies last autumn (the first time I'd heard the phrase), and it suddenly seemed the right thing to do. Ten years before I'd been enthralled by the *Second Sex* and I'd been to Women's Liberation meetings since 1970; but I'd never extrapolated from that enthusiasm the notion of studying feminist ideas academically.

How do you set about organising a Women's Studies course? I went along a couple of times to a similar course two friends of mine were running locally. Then I homed in on the Abraham Moss Centre because I'd been told it was a new multi-million community centre particularly amenable to unconventional courses. I went along to see the Centre Principal and head of Adult Education who both liked the idea, though they professed a certain sceptical wariness. They told me to go ahead.

I wasn't sure who would be attracted to the course, so I tried a blanket approach to publicity. *Spare Rib* put something in and I was interviewed, on local radio and television. (One bright young man, doing the top and tail to the interview after I'd left the studio, added an extra fictional fillip to his piece: "And then I asked Jill Liddington what she thought about men, and she took one look at me..." and he pressed his raspberry-blowing button.)

I sat alone in the classroom on the first evening of term, immured from the rest of the world by miles of impenetrable corridors. I felt slightly silly; probably no-one would come and I'd have to hand back my class register as virginal as I got it.

But gradually 10 or 12 women stuck their heads round the door and wandered in.



Where had they all come from? Half had heard of the course through reading *Spare Rib* and half through watching *Look North*. Some came locally from around Crumpsall and Cheetham, and some were from foreign parts like Cheshire and Derbyshire. Apart from Kathleen, Cath and myself everybody was a housewife; ages ranged from Cath, who's 20 and works in a community shop, to Emma who's 69; politics varied from Liberal, through socialist variants, to Communist. Most women had left school some years ago, and this course was their first stab, since they'd had children, at concentrating their minds in one area.

None of the women had any connections with the Women's Movement. Some felt hostile and critical towards what they saw as the Movement's rhetoric and extremism. I wondered why they had come; what were they looking for?

The common bond was "women's rights"; everybody wanted to find out more about equal pay, anti-discrimination legislation, sexism and social conditioning, and bringing up children. Perhaps the primary motive which brought everybody to the class was to talk about the paralyzing effects of being a mother and housewife.

Margaret, Rose, Myra, Esta and Emma had grown up children; Pauline, Anne, Carol and Barbara had small children who made heavy demands on their time. "Being stuck at home all the time can really eat into you" said Barbara, "I know I've got a degree, but I just couldn't pick up a phone and ask somebody for a job; I can't imagine anyone wants to employ me, a housewife."

Another motive for coming was to have a real incentive for reading and thinking about things that easily get shoved into the background by the demands of children and housework. "I always thought I was a political animal, but actually I used to skip over some newspaper articles" Myra admitted, "doing this course, I've become quite ashamed of my gaps, and now I keep on picking up odd pamphlets and books and things that affect women." Cath was equally enthusiastic, "The best book I read was the *Second Sex* and now I've read some Sheila Rowbotham books, looking up all the difficult words as I go. I've even begun to win some arguments."

Each week I would prepare teaching material from books I'd read, pamphlets I'd seen, bits I'd cut out of the paper, conversations I'd had. A time consuming job, but very engrossing. After the first meeting, which we'd sat like UN delegates behind formal desks, we rearranged the chairs into a circle. I usually talked about the week's topic for 5 or 10 minutes, then my monologue quickly evolved into energetic discussion. People offered anecdotes to back up or refute general statements I'd made. Sometimes discussion became so anecdotal that it lost its coherence; talking about making beds and the horrors of leaving cold hot water bottles at the bottom particularly sticks in my mind, though I can't remember what started it.

The best sessions were those that hit a balance between theory and anecdote. The second session on the family was probably a bit too academic; we spent most of the time looking at Engels' theories about the evolution of patriarchy and Bowlby's notion of maternal deprivation, so that people had scant opportunity to say how the material related to this vital area of their lives. The next week, talking about sexism in education, I probably leant too far the opposite way: I didn't bring enough general material to the class to body out personal reminiscences and views. The session on women and books perhaps found the best balance: I had banged on for so long about Jane Austen, Doris Lessing and Penelope Mortimer that most people were bullied into reading the books. I started off for a quarter of an hour making certain comparisons (for instance, how Jane Austen's heroines are created in a pre-marriage environment and the inevitable denouement is their galloping off into the marital sunset, whereas Lessing's or Mortimer's protagonists' arena was post marital and they had some choice of solutions. People offered their own opinions on whether this kind of fiction could have been written by a man, and how much they could identify with the predicaments of each of the heroines. Discussion was both informed and felt. ▶

Our sense of a group grew strongly during this term. We began to develop a shared perspective, a common vocabulary. Meetings became euphoric occasions. We invited husbands, boyfriends, sons along one evening so that the men who reckoned they were sympathetic ("But what do all those women on your course actually want? If I knew, I'd try to help.") could see what we were learning. And on the last weekend of term we all went round to Myra's house to present projects we'd done (plus eat excellent cakes) on women in China, the male-dominated process of child-birth, trade unions and assessments of the course.

The term finished on a high. We worked as a group. We'd learned a lot.

So I planned a second term. One of the criticisms of the first term was of superficiality: it's irritating to read about one subject and feel you've got to go on to something else next week. Everybody seemed determined to do more reading, so I suggested we looked at three quite difficult topics for 4 sessions apiece: women in local history, women in other cultures, and women and films. Everybody seemed happy and nobody came up with any radically different suggestions. Buoyed up by what I interpreted as everybody's self-confidence, I suggested that, instead of my leading discussion about women in foreign cultures, each week somebody else should "play teacher". From this point, things started to decline. The sense of group strength seemed to dissipate, and numbers decreased.

In retrospect I realise it was unwise to propose rather heavy topics. The first term worked because of the immediacy of the subjects. Local history is more tangential. People who came hoping to relate the situation of the Lancashire mill girls to their own situation found themselves frustrated by the complexities of the material, let alone the interpretations. I found out later that people wanted a formal guide through the material; I had expected just to lead a general discussion.

There was a further ebb of enthusiasm when I asked people to volunteer to talk about women in other countries. Many people were reluctant — often understandably because of small children — to come forward and take that responsibility. A few people were dismayed that I wanted to recede from the formal role of "teacher" making other people take the initiative. "I was horrified," one person told me later, "when you admitted you didn't know much about women in a particular country. I just couldn't believe it."

Another criticism that emerged towards the post-mortem end of the course was that it had become too far removed from reality. "When I looked at the summer term syllabus, I felt I didn't want to come along just to watch films all evening," Myra said. "Really important things are happening that affect women — the Referendum, for instance — which we aren't even touching." Cath felt we were all being too pleasant to each other; the political chasms between us were gaping ones, but we just politely papered over all our ideological differences. Anne was irritated by the ease with which we always blamed capitalist structures for sexism and racism.

I've recounted some of the problems we came up against because they seem to illuminate dilemmas central to women's studies. It's imperative to be precise about objectives and the expectations of the group.

The central dilemma is, are you teaching a course or sharing an experience? I dislike playing an authority role, and I particularly dislike it in a context as egalitarian as Women's Studies. But when I tried to recede from a formal teaching role, either by asking others to volunteer to lead session or by not automatically filling gaps and silences myself, it sapped people's confidence in themselves and in the group. When the discussion is directly related to people's lives, the problem is less apparent; as it soon becomes more academic, either everybody reads and contributes equally or else you have to relapse into traditional lecturing form.

A related problem is whether to put the emphasis on *Women's Studies* or *Women's Studies*. Should you concentrate on building solidarity through a consciousness-raising approach, or on the process of absorbing new material leading to different perspectives? The first term we concentrated on the former, at the risk of becoming a bit chatty and undirected; the second term we tended to the latter and people felt distanced from the material.

A third dilemma is how far you should concentrate on the acknowledged common ground of "women's oppression" to the exclusion of other differences. We could all discuss quite amicably the nature of sexism; when we went on to causes and cures we diverged. Issues like the functions of capitalism, of the class system, of homosexuality, or formal organisations, of separatism were all inflammatory. The only reason you meet together in the first place is to talk about women; if you concentrate on what is shared you keep the group together, though perhaps artificially; if you expose the differences, people in the minority feel cut off. The only lesbian who came, came only to the first meeting; while Anne (and Carol) were constantly irritated by what they saw as other women's habit of dragging left-wing politics into every discussion.

There are real problems. We tried to surmount them, and although we went through a low period this term, the course has ended on a most amicable note. More importantly everybody has learnt a great deal about themselves and about other women, and wants to go on meeting, talking about politics and feminism, and in some cases, to become involved in women's actions groups. ■

If Jill's article has inspired you to start your own women's studies course, approach your local adult education centre. It might be a department in a further education college, a community centre or an institution.

Qualifications required vary from district to district, in most cases it's only necessary to convince the centre that you've got the knowledge and ability to set up the course.

syllabus	
week 1	what does women's Liberation mean? a general introduction to how and why the Women's Movement has developed
week 2	women and the family discussion of Engels' theories on the growth of the nuclear family; the role of women in childcare; Bowlby's notion of maternal deprivation; comparison with non-nuclear structures
week 3	women in education overt discrimination and the 'hidden curriculum' at school; sexism in children's books.
week 4	women and law legal changes since the Married Women's Property Acts; areas of existing discrimination and what they imply about the status of women; current Parliamentary legislation
week 5	women and work women's work as mainly an extension of housework: cooking, cleaning, caring and service jobs; housework as unpaid labour; the double shift system; BBC film from 'Women at Work' series
week 6	women and politics suffragettes and the fight for the vote; women in politics now; the case for separatism in political and trade union organisations
week 7	women's public image women as sex object; women used in advertising; John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing' BBC series/book on how women and men present themselves differently
week 8	women and the media the roles women play in plays, serials and series; the presentation of information about the outside world by women as newscasters and reporters
week 9	women and books Jane Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , Doris Lessing's <i>A Man and Two Women</i> (short stories) and Penelope Mortimer's <i>The Home</i>
week 10	women and film Mai Zetterling's <i>The Girls</i>
week 11	women and men: open session

The inspector for the City of Manchester says he would not demand teaching experience or a degree but he would expect experience and expertise in the field, in other words, general knowledge.

If you don't like the idea of setting a course up alone, you can give the course with another woman; a member of the *Spare Rib* collective gave a course with 5 other women.

June 1974

Hey, she said, write a poem she said
 well, I said, no names, no places, no dates
 no times, just a series of pronouns and
 verbs and the odd adjective or two.
 doesn't do
 to expose me and my friends, my family, the
 odd lover, the even odder never-lover
 (well, we never got it together)

so we sat down together, cheek
 to swing of hair and looked through books
 and talked through each other and
 wrote this poem together and typed it
 out and listened quite quietly

while the others (ok, I'll come clean, the others
 were women . . .) argued over it.
 It doesn't like women, said one.
 It doesn't like *some* women, we thought.
 It is very anti working-class, said one.
 It is anti-working class sexism, we thought.
 (Remember, we conveyed through glances — remember
 the time past the building sites at dusk
 when they wouldn't let us past, we weren't
 even dolled up . . .)
 the grammar isn't right, said one.
 Sometimes you want to explode syntax, we thought.
 Why can't you say what you *mean* said one.
 That's a jolting electric image, we thought.
 Anyway, poetry is moribund, she said.
 Moribund? We thought? Ever since Mr
 Marx got down to the British Museum
 lots of people having been singing the
 death-knell of capitalism; I mean,
 it has to lie down before you can pronounce it
 dead, we thought.

and we had a little wonder to ourselves
 about them who dance like fury to Stones
 raping words, to Rod Stewart piggery,
 and allow the moribund bits of them
 at their need for rhythm.

Naaa, I said, I don't want to write a poem.
 I feel so — well, so sort of — well, exposed,
 don't want my struggling content condemned because
 it has to use a tired form till the old have
 withered off the edge.
 Keep myself to myself, I thought, drink
 my coffee, do my work, smile and try
 not to lose my temper or get upset
 because nobody's got *time* (well, only the
 odd lover and the kids) to look at my ol'
 moribund feelings.

Hey, she said, you liar, you've
 written a poem.

Micheline Wandor

bangkok breakfast

the monk
 stands
 under a flowering tree
 prodigal with sweetness
 women come women go
 and come with earthen pots
 to fill his, thus their own
 torn flesh of priestlessness
 lacking substance they
 subsist on his
 spare shadow, stain
 his robes
 which burn with sacrifice
 to make their merit, food
 and beggar both they give
 men and children suck
 for their salvation, their
 coin of vile body
 seeds the ground prodigal
 with sweetness under
 a flowering tree
 the monk
 stands

Michele Roberts

HYSTERIA II

We're here in my chair,
 monkey-tangled, paw-in-paw,
 mother and son.
 Telly on. Apollo-Soyuz clinch,
 connect, the Russian slithers
 through to the American.
 In 2001 someone's lifeline broke.
 He snaked away first, then
 drifted, hands held out
 No air for his lungs
 No weight to pull on his bowels
 No horizon to narrow his eyes towards
 No anything to dig his heels in,
 spin to face the ship
 for one last wail of love and protest.
 A circularity
 Without direction or limits
 Nothing.
 Let go my hand and
 so might I spin off
 and swim helpless with these dead fish of the universe.

Alison Fell

PROBATION OFFICER

Jean McCrindle worked as a Probation Officer in London in the 1960s until the shortcomings of the job forced her to give it up. Here she describes the work and its frustrations.

When I walked into the court on my first day as a probation officer I had no idea what I was supposed to do, no idea of what was going on. A small notebook, an *A to Z* map of London, a little black briefcase were the only aids provided by the Probation Service for the job.

It was a new London court built only a few years ago, and it had a reputation for toughness. I had been assigned there immediately on acceptance by the service after an interview which seemed more designed to discover if I had the social aura for the work rather than any particular qualifications for dealing with people in criminal situations. I wasn't asked a single question about my attitude to social work, other than if I saw any difficulties in being a probation officer. I had said that, in some senses it wasn't a voluntary relationship which other types of social work would provide, and that this must set up tensions. In fact I didn't know enough to ask more questions. I wanted to go into social work after teaching, and simply looked for a job I could do without training. That, and the fact I had a degree, seemed sufficient for the Service, which was, and still is, desperately short of people. At that time I thought a probation officer's job was to attempt to create a relationship with the 'client' (that is, the probationer), which would enable him or her to keep going in a job without again getting involved with the law.

The physical structure of the court struck me immediately. Although it was new, it was exactly the same in arrangement as the one upstairs built at the turn of the century. There were no innovations — it was strictly hierarchical. The magistrate sat at the highest point in the court, with his own entrance and virtually blocked off from everything else; beneath him, in tiers of descending importance, were the clerk, lawyers to his left but slightly raised, police on the right and the prisoners isolated in the dock below. The public was squeezed in at the back with room for only a dozen. Significantly, within this arrangement there was no special place for the probation officers, who squeezed in beside the lawyers. It showed, I thought, the service's marginality in the eyes of those responsible for court procedures.

I found it hard to hear what was going on. I had the impression of a mumble between the magistrate and the clerk, and I learnt later that the prisoner could not often hear either. There was no arrangement made for microphones. On that first day, and sometimes later, the proceedings about what sort of punishment was to be meted out appeared to me, and I think to anyone not accustomed to the court, to be a complete puzzle — and I imagined what it must be like to be in the dock for the first time.

“Plenty of probation officers t

I got an idea of what my job was to be on that first day when a girl in her late teens was found guilty of shop-lifting a couple of dresses. There was some doubt as to whether she could pay the fine, and the magistrate asked me to find out whether he could fine her on the spot or would have to extend the fine over a long period. This I discovered was to be my main task — to find out for the magistrate whether it was worth his while fining a person.

I went to interview the girl, who was terrified, and asked if she could give me further information. It turned out that she had left home and was out of a job. She said she had friends who would pay — which in effect they did. I went back into the court and told the magistrate who was delighted. I was rather shocked at the pecuniary motive which I saw constantly emphasized during the following days and, like one of those people who go round to see if people can pay their taxes, I felt my role had been reduced to that of financial officer.

In even quite serious cases — menopausal women who had never done anything, who had no financial reasons for stealing, and who were quite disturbed — all the magistrate seemed concerned about, and wanted me to find out, was whether they could pay the fine. Very rarely was there any suggestion that such women be kept in touch with the probation service — as I felt they should — to help them get over what was obviously a difficult period in their lives, for many of them showed quite distinct signs of neuroses.

At that time very stiff fines were being handed out for shop-lifting, for a large shopping area came under the court's jurisdiction, and the magistrates were sick of the high rate of theft, especially by what they called 'foreign' elements. An average fine for a first offence was £20, and I knew a woman who got £150 for a second offence, and two women who were sent to prison for three months for a first offence involving about £100 worth of goods. They were poverty-stricken, with five children between them and no husbands, and they had careered up the main street stealing what they could.

It quickly became evident to me that a magistrate was more likely to accept your opinion on a matter of whether a person could pay or not, than on a social or psychological matter. Many magistrates had contempt for the training in social work of probation officers, although the magistrates themselves, trained as barristers, had no training in social work or psychological motivation: they simply weren't interested. Their sole concern was in administering the law as it stood, and they used the probation officer to ensure that a person didn't escape the clutches of the court and never pay the fine, or to protect themselves from being

too harsh on someone who was obviously in great personal difficulties — with all the consequences that this might have, not on the prisoner, but on themselves.

The exception to this is in cases of young girls who seem about to enter what the magistrate calls 'a life of crime', and drug addicts on whom we had always to do a full report. The majority of women I had to deal with were shop-lifters and teenagers picked up in bars and cafes, and on some days there might be anything between six and a dozen girls in court (out of an average of 30 people during the day) with whom I would have to deal.

I remember wondering, as I looked round the unfamiliar court, how the magistrates were chosen: it was so overwhelmingly obvious that the one there that day — and the majority I saw during my time as a probation officer — were completely out of touch with the people who came into court. Their language, their attitudes, their dress — and often their own conviction that they were in touch with real life by sitting in judgement on others year in and year out — betrayed them. Barristers for at least seven years before they could become magistrates, the majority were upper class as one would expect and some I came across were large land-owners or possessors of inherited wealth. While some were well-meaning they were all without any real knowledge and not one of them, in my experience, was fair. By their attitudes to criminality you wouldn't have thought there had been any advance in the study of crime for 50 years.

After my first morning I was introduced to the senior magistrate by the male probation officer. Probably assuming that I was a rather nice middle class girl who had never seen any 'criminal haunts', he suggested I make a tour of the area that night with a policewoman. Meanwhile he reminisced about prostitutes, of whom a number passed through the court, calling them the 'salt of this area' and recommending them for three virtues which he spelled out for me: 'they keep crime off the streets; they preserve family life; they keep perversion where it ought to be'. With this Gladstonian vision of prostitution fresh before me, I set off that evening with the plain clothes policewoman, a large girl fresh up from the country.

As we went on our round of the clubs in the area, pointing at this one or that and explaining where the drug addicts hung out, she told me about a man who had recently run up to her when she was in uniform and said he wanted to bring a case against a woman for refusing to go to bed with him. It appeared that he had bought her dinner and drinks on the understanding . . . The policewoman advised him — and it appears that this is true — that he could take the

woman to court. He would have to prove that before he had bought her dinner she had agreed to sleep with him, in which case she would be found guilty; it would not be enough, however, if she had only said, 'let's have a nice evening', or some remark of the kind. The policewoman said she got lots of these cases.

Our tour was broken short by a fight. A girl was being beaten up by a man; they were both coloured. The policewoman asked me to hold onto the girl while she tackled the man. I was petrified — I couldn't physically hold the woman so I simply talked to her, she was quite beaten up, but the policewoman pinned down the man. Then the police cars came and the couple were taken off. I saw and heard for the first time that night the racist prejudices of the police, who commonly call coloured people *nignogs* and often far more derogatory names. The Irish come into the same category: I never heard the police say a good word for either.

Good relations with the police are essential for a probation officer who has to depend on them for a lot of information, contacts, sources, charge sheets, etc. After my first day, when I got an idea of the job, I was to be allowed to look at the charge sheets in the morning for likely cases during the day. I would then often interview the girls in the cells; I had to be careful because, unless they were pleading guilty, I wasn't supposed to talk to them at all. But it was a quick way of finding out if I would have to get more information on them. The magistrates always listen to the police and trust them, in contrast to the probation officers who — in my court at least — were treated with great brusqueness. But it is only fair to say that the probation officers asked for this because they were extremely obsequious and never stood up for what rights they had. In fact, of course, the law doesn't give them many rights, since they have been brought into the courts as an afterthought and meet a great deal of hostility from the police and magistrates. They have to tread very warily indeed.

Like the two male and one other female probation officers attached to the two courts — a male and a female for each — I had an office in a converted cell. In the afternoon, when it would be rare for the court to have cases which would concern me (the afternoons being devoted to such offenses as travelling on the tube without a ticket), I would interview the people on probation to me personally. A probation officer has probationers who live in his or her area; in mine, which was primarily a business rather than a residential area, I had rather few, ten or so whom I had inherited, and another half a dozen whom the court had assigned to me. In other areas

told me that it was more important to know your magistrate than your 'client'."

the load can be as high as 40 or 50. The terms of probation have to be agreed publicly in court, and the person will usually agree because he or she thinks of it as getting off, since if you are put on probation you are not fined or gaoled. However, it is not as simple as that, because if the probationer breaks his probation he may be charged with the original offence, and the person must report as often as the probation officer requires.

Clauses in the probation order include also that the probationer must accept visits from the officer, and lead an industrious life. Relations with probationers are the most crucial aspect of a probation officer's job, and it was the part I enjoyed the most. I was free from the pressure of the court, from the pressure of finding out about a person's financial state, to find out about the people involved. I sometimes had probationers who had been brought up in another court but who lived in my area. I remember one in particular.

She was a woman with six children, two of them married, one of whom had just left school, and three still at school. She had been brought up for shop-lifting and had been caught with her youngest child with her. In any case where a child is involved a magistrate gets extremely agitated and automatically asks for a probation report; in this case the woman was without a man in the house, and since she had a previous conviction the magistrate remarked publicly in court that he wanted to know whether she was a fit person to have charge of children. This was reported in the press. By the time the case was referred to me, the woman was in a state of extreme tension, fearing her children would be taken away; the situation hadn't been eased by a visit from her two eldest children who had had a row with her about the case. My advent certainly didn't help. Her children were by three different men, and each of the marriages had broken up because of the husbands' drunkenness. Her last husband was £300 in arrears with maintenance, and her motive — which I believed — for going into the shop on a Thursday before collecting her children's allowance on the following day, was to get something to feed the children: this was the only way she knew how to do it. She was obviously very bad at managing money, but she didn't have much to manage, and she owed a number of bills, for electricity etc. I went to her home, in a miserable basement. In my report I suggested she get some sort of psychiatric support and that she be put on probation, not fined since she couldn't pay, nor be put in prison. I stated that I didn't think she was the sort of person who mistreated children. In this case the magistrate accepted my report. She became my probationer.

This was one of the few times I was successful. More often than not the magistrates ignored my recommendations to put on probation. One case, which I think illustrates the extreme prejudice magistrates have against any suggestion of psychiatric difficulties, concerned a girl of 20 who was brought up in my court for passing false cheques for a lot of money. She had a previous conviction at the age of 11, when she had been put on probation for two years. This time she was remanded for a week — which meant Holloway — while I did a report on her.

The girl's father, a chemist whom I saw, launched into a violent attack on his daughter; she had been wicked since the age of 11, she wilfully disobeyed him, it was time she was taught a lesson — let her go to prison, that's all she was worth. I couldn't get anything out of the girl herself; she was completely withdrawn. On the basis of the previous probation report it was obvious that she was a very seriously disturbed girl with a very odd home background of rejection. I thought she should be put on probation and given psychiatric help. At that time psychiatric help seemed the only alternative to imprisonment and a fine. I handed the report to the magistrate, and when he came to the word 'psychiatric' he was outraged. My report, backed by the earlier report, was brushed aside in favour of a six-month prison sentence. In his outburst, he said, 'I can't keep accepting these diagnoses of people with psychiatric troubles, all people have difficulties and troubles. People when they're 20 know right from wrong'. And this, of course, was in front of the girl.

Plenty of probation officers told me that it was more important to know your magistrate than your 'client'. This was certainly true. It was always worth knowing if the magistrate had a young daughter, or perhaps a difficult teenage son, or if he was an ex-army man and might therefore be lenient to someone who had been in the service. And the mood of a magistrate on any particular day might vary; it was worth being aware of the changes.

I wasn't prepared to play up to this, and there's no doubt that this harmed my probationers, although it's true that I never again mentioned psychiatry to that particular magistrate, who — for whatever personal reasons — entirely rejected the suggestion that a family background or a social situation affected a person. This, however, is precisely what a probation officer is there to find out and inform him about.

Soon after this I had a case which stirred a latent uneasiness about my whole position. A 17-year-old girl who had been found riding on the back of a motorcycle her boyfriend had stolen, was remanded for three

weeks but, because her bail did not come up, she was sent to Holloway. She had not been found guilty, she had not even pleaded — and there she was for three weeks in prison. The time in the remand wing of Holloway, for there is no other remand home for girls in London, is to all intents and purposes the equivalent of a prison sentence. And three weeks is more than a charge of drunkenness would get. Not knowing that her bail had failed, it was ten days before I inquired about her to do my report. It's often the case that a girl in court gives a bail name to the police who can't contact the person until the evening. In the meantime the girl is in Holloway and the bail has to go there and sign a form, and the people at Holloway send the girl to court from which she is released. But now I discovered that the girl had given two names, one of which was unsatisfactory to the police because he was a beat, and the other which they hadn't been able to contact. Consequently the girl had been sitting in Holloway for ten days, with another week and a half still to remain there. More-over, no one had told her that her bail hadn't come through, no one had asked her if she could suggest someone else. I went to see the magistrate, and told him I didn't think it was good for a 17-year-old, whom for all we knew wasn't even guilty, to be sitting in Holloway. He said there was nothing that could be done, except to get an order from a Judge in Chamber. I went to the other probation officer who said, 'don't you interfere, it won't do her any harm, being there for three weeks'. I rang up a lawyer friend of mine who said exactly the same, I checked with the police who said it wasn't their job to tell her her bail hadn't come up. Literally, no one gave a damn. I was furious. I decided to use help from outside the court structure and I rang the National Council for Civil Liberties. They immediately arranged for questions to be asked in the House of Commons. Therefore the case was heard prematurely the next day, and the girl was put on probation for two years.

The case also appeared in the newspapers. The magistrate called me up and asked if I was responsible for leaking the story to the press. I said no, but that I wasn't sorry. Then the Clerk of the Court had me up on the carpet and said that if I was going to regard myself as a guardian angel I had better not remain a probation officer. This was the magistrate's job, and I was not there to question his decisions. Technically, he was right, of course: it was quite legal for the girl to be remanded in custody for three weeks.

But I couldn't help feeling that the process of law was rigged against people like these, and that inside this process my own

"The policewoman asked me to hold onto the girl while she tackled the man."

position was spurious. I was unable to insert myself into the system — any more than any other probation officer in my experience seemed able — to actually fight for probationers or to oppose the magistrate's view with their own. And I felt that, given the fact that probation officers were supposed to have more knowledge and training in certain aspects of people than the magistrate, this ought to be possible. However, I was isolated in my opinion. In the court where I worked I never once knew of a probation officer taking anything but the magistrate's line, bowing to his superior knowledge. One of the male officers once said to me, referring to a case in which a girl was found guilty of shop-lifting from a large national chain of stores: 'You really ought to have more sympathy for the victims of theft.'

It is certainly true that, in the hierarchical position occupied by a magistrate in relation to a probation officer, and taking into account the class backgrounds usual to both, it is highly unlikely that a magistrate would want to admit that a probation officer could have insights into people which he himself had missed.

But such ideas were hardly forthcoming from the two male probation officers attached to the two courts. One was a tired old man who had come in 30 years before and wanted no more trouble until he retired. The only time I saw him moved was during a case in which a young girl of lower-middle class background, who had been led astray by associating with girls richer than herself, was brought up for shop-lifting. I think he probably identified in terms of his own daughter — though it's hardly necessary to say that there were many other cases in which he might have been equally, if not more moved. Whenever the magistrate asked me a question in court, he used to nudge me to make sure that I got rapidly to my feet.

The second one was obsequious to anyone he felt his superior — and because I had a degree I came into that category in his eyes — and at the same time a social climber who was always telling me about the society cocktail parties he attended in his function as president of a business organization. One day I heard him talking on the phone to a woman who had rung up — we were often rung up by people in difficulties who had seen, perhaps on TV, that probation officers would help — to ask for assistance and advice. She was frequently woken up at night by her husband on his knees beside the bed with his arms across her thighs. 'Well, Mrs. So-and-So,' said this probation officer, 'you have to put up with us men, you know, we do go through difficult phases. Keep calm and be nice to him and I'm sure everything will sort itself out . . .' It was a complete denial of what the woman was

trying to say, of the anxiety she was unable entirely to express. I would have asked her to come in and see me, and suggested perhaps that her husband go to a doctor.

I began to feel part of an authoritarian regime and also that the machine was so big, so oppressive, that anything I could do would only minimally effect change. The personal contradiction was borne on me most in my relations with my probationers. At one level I had to play the role demanded of me by my job in which I had to ask them certain questions: how was the job going, did they have money, and at another I was genuinely interested in them as human beings and trying to establish a human contact with them. Social case workers are supposed not to get emotionally involved but to play a supportive role, to 'help them to help themselves'; at the same time the role places an obligation on you to make friends with people so that they tell you their personal problems. I never found it possible to remain emotionally uninvolved: I reacted to my probationers and they reacted to me. I couldn't see any way round this, it seemed part of any human relationship. On the one hand I was a probation officer with the law behind me, so my probationers lied to me as they had to, and some of them used me purely as a social service. On the other, if I kept entirely within the role, I would never make the contact required. I suspect this is the experience of most probation officers, if they are honest. It is a very difficult job. If you are in any way concerned about your probationer you simply have to deny the role you are put in, for you can't — or I couldn't — do the job any other way, except at a purely technical level of getting them money and keeping them out of scraps with the law.

This ambivalence made me feel very badly. Because anything I was told I had to write up in my reports, and I was sometimes told things on the basis of a genuine liking which, if put in the report, would tell against the woman. I had one girl with two children and a husband in prison who had maintained all along that she wasn't living with another man. One day she came to me and said she was feeling very badly about having kept up this pretence. I really didn't know what to do. Whether to discuss it with her, to find out whether it was a good thing for her — which I think it was — and then report it; in which case the Children's Officer would have to know because the children were still under a court order. Or simply to leave it. The paradox was that her admission came only as the result of having created a very good relationship with her, which is what you are supposed to do as a probation officer. Perhaps I was temperamentally unsuited for the job.

I had intended to stay a year and then

move to some other type of social work. But I was finding the emotional involvement too great. The work was mentally exhausting, and I could never do anything else. We worked six days a week, with at least two evenings of visits on top; for this I received about £13.10, which after deductions gave me a little over £10 a week clear.

I went to see the woman who had interviewed me originally. I said I didn't think the job was one I could do or one that, in the circumstances, was worth doing. She disagreed. 'The law has got to exist,' she concluded. 'I don't think the job merits the pretensions you make for it, in that case,' I replied. I handed in my resignation and, almost as quickly as I had entered, I left the service.□

"I felt my role had been reduced to that of a financial officer."

fenwomen

Sally Alexander reviews *Fenwomen* a book by Mary Chamberlain published in September by Virago, the new feminist imprint, with photographs by Angela Phillips.

Fenwomen is an appropriate first book from the feminist imprint Virago. It is a "statement of women's lives in an English village", Gislea, the pseudonym of a real village in the Fens. I say appropriate because feminism seeks out women's personal experience, and *Fenwomen* attempts to do this by documenting some women's accounts of their own lives, work, marriage etc. Mary Chamberlain has interviewed the women of Gislea and set down their stories intervening only to select and arrange the material into sections: girlhood, school, marriage, work, religion, politics, recreation and old age . . . *Fenwomen* is easy to read because it's like listening to women talking; interest accumulates as one woman follows another and different images, attitudes, perceptions of a shared situation emerge. I read *Fenwomen* with a double interest; that of a feminist and of a working historian, from both these perspectives the book is thought-provoking if sometimes disturbing.

The mood is set resolute and bleak in the opening — "Black fen they call it . . . Black for the dark peaty soil, black for the mood of the area, for its history, and for its future." . . . "Black fen, hard lives." . . . Poverty and isolation are treated as synonymous with the fens and these twin themes recur persistently from the lips of the women themselves.

Poverty was and is endemic. For many women who passed their girl- and early woman-hood in the first decades of this century, their lives were simply a struggle to survive. According to the census employment opportunities before the last war were confined to the land and service. But memory demonstrates that poverty forced a multitude of partial occupations on a woman struggling to raise a family. In the 1930's, for instance, Meg Ladell, one of five children, remembers, "Mum used to make rag rugs. And she took in washing too. And charring. Gostling, the baker, had a butcher's shop too, and she used to go up there and they used to give her a shilling for a Saturday morning's work, scrubbing, the hardest work. And she'd have it in meat. A shilling's worth of meat. That would be a meal for us the next day . . . We used to go and weed asparagus beds, round by the cemetery. And fruit picking, she used to get. And I'd run errands, two errands for three ha'pence . . . And she'd peg rugs. She must have pegged hundreds of rugs to keep us. . . . And the drapers, he had like a book of material dress patterns and at the back of each bit of cloth was a stick on label. That was our job, as children, to pull these labels off, . . . The draper would give her those when he'd run them off and a new lot had come in. And that was new cloth and she'd cut that up for rags for the rugs . . . She'd sit there till two or three in the morning pegging rugs to get them finished . . ."

In this way Meg Ladell's Mother earned "7s 6d or 10 shillings one week, and then nothing again the next." Parish relief gave her nothing because she had married a Londoner who seldom came home and when he did "dressed like a millionaire. He was tall, and he'd come down in a bowler hat, lovely suit, watch, lovely shoes — he looked like a millionaire." Listening to women telling their own stories opens up a world beyond the bald statistics of the census or the unemployment figures. The depression of the 1930's — a sombre distant decade to post war generations — becomes immediate and we begin to understand what living through it really meant.

Alice Rushmoor's memory reaches beyond the First World War to the last decade of the 19th century, when she and her brothers and sisters spent much of their childhood in the workhouse.

"Eventually my older sister went to work, and my other sister went to work, and I used to work. Stone picking. About thirteen I was then. And mother an invalid. She died young. Then we had to fend for ourselves . . . After she were gone, I had to stay at home and look after the others. I never went out no more. The others got married. I was the last one. Ain't got no home, nor nothing. So I got married."

Alice was seventeen when she got married, and she had nine children, "And shall I tell you about all the money my husband earned? Sometimes none. He worked on the land. Took Kit's Chance. But that were only



in the spring and summer. No work in the winter . . . He went with the poachers often. He were caught sometimes. Went to jail. But I were luckier than Aggy Jex. Nobody wouldn't go with her husband, because he had a club foot. They could trace it."

Alice's husband was a blackleg —

"When they had labour troubles up in Norfolk and the men there were on strike, the big farmers in Norfolk used to pay our men, whether they went or not, so that they would always be ready if they wanted them . . . They were paying our men more to go up there than they were paying their own men, just to make their own men suffer."

Alice exposes the unheroic underbelly of class struggle revealing the indignities and desperations that accompany poverty — indignities which have only partly disappeared. The welfare state has replaced the workhouse, people no longer starve, but employment remains uncertain and irregular and women still labour under the double burden of wage-work and household management on a small weekly budget. Post-war generations now have some new and different problems.

The young women's lives sound depressing not just because they are empty of opportunity and experience. Ann Sharman is 20, pregnant with one son aged three. Her husband is irregularly employed as a labourer. She wants to train as a nursery nurse but young children and lack of transport are preventing her. For Ann life in Gislea is uneventful and isolated.

"I suppose I got pregnant the first time because there weren't nothing to do in the village . . .

There's not many women in the village during the day, they all go out to work, on the land or in the factories. There are about three of us that live up my road who don't go out to work for the day and we're all young mums. I do cleaning two mornings a week but got to give it up because of the baby. But there's not much to do for women."

Other women tell of frustrated ambitions and talents, and depression (held off by tranquillisers) hovers in the background of many women's talk. And yet the structure of women's lives remains the same as their mothers and grandmothers — work, marriage, children, work — but this sense of continuity is deceptive. Gislea is not a self-sufficient and self-contained community any more. Work, food and entertainment all come from outside, so that the former basis for personal and social relationships within the village has been undermined. Many families have lived in Gislea for generations but it takes more to create a relationship with your neighbour than mere physical proximity. Similarly social and economic changes have been gnawing away at sexual relationships between men and women. The division of labour remains the same. Men and women inhabit different worlds mapped out for them in a short-lived childhood. Men hand over their wage packet and most domestic responsibilities to their wives; men's work and women's seldom overlap. Few women envisage life without marriage, partly because no woman's wage could support a family, and some marry at 17 as Alice Rushmoor did 75 years ago. But the vitality of the division of labour, between men and women, is diminishing. Banks, offices and factory employment in the towns

are drawing women away from traditional occupation on the land or in domestic service. The pill is replacing less scientific forms of birth-control ("And I'll tell you something else" Aida Hayhoe a widow of 82 confides, "See I had three children. And I didn't want no more. My mother had fourteen children and I didn't want that. So if I stayed up mending, my husband would be asleep when I come to bed. That were simple weren't it.") A glimpse of economic independence as well as control over their own fertility are giving women a taste of what life could be . . .

But *Fenwomen* does no more than glance at these changes, as it is firmly rooted in a belief in the continuity of rural life; and this is the book's weakness. The reader is left with an impression of desolation, of a village lying stranded outside the mainstream of political and economic life, but it is only an impression. Deliberately there is no attempt at analysis. This absence is partly a result of method, and partly of conception. Throughout Mary Chamberlain preserves a stringently low profile, respecting the women's own testimony, but not following its implications.

Nevertheless *Fenwomen* is a rewarding book. I was stimulated to read other books on rural life written by women and men. Flora Thompson's *Larkrise to Candleford*, for instance, *The Autobiography of a Cornish Childhood* by A.L. Rowse, and *Village Life and Labour* ed. by Raphael Samuel, as well as *Akenfield*, on which this book is clearly modelled. Let's hope that *Fenwomen* sells as well for Virago as *Akenfield* did for Penguin so that Virago can encourage more women to document their own history. □



Weeding



Waiting for the bus to the doctor



5 o'clock rush hour



Leaving the playgroup

exhibition

Mary Beale

Mary Beale was a 17th century painter whose work is now on exhibition at the Geffrye Museum, London. She was a portrait painter, like so many women artists, as the necessary education for other genres was denied them. Her portraits were much in demand according to the diary in which her husband carefully recorded her commissions and prices.

Publicity for the show misleadingly describes her as England's first professional woman painter. In fact, an artist called Lavina Teerling had worked as a court painter for Henry VIII, Mary and Elizabeth I.

17th century England seems to have been comparatively favourable for women artists. Mary Beale was perhaps the most prolific and popular but there were others including Anne Carlile, Susan Penelope Rose, Marie Varelst, the Cleyn sisters, Anne Marie Carew, and also Artemesia Gentileschi who visited England in 1638. The question for feminist art historians is why society at that time favoured the emergence of women professional painters.

One explanation for the groups of women artists who crop up in history is that women provided alternative education for themselves, with established artists running women's studios. Mary Beale was no exception — Sarah Curtis is one of her pupils whose work is included in the exhibition. □

Rosie Parker

To December 21: Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Rd., London E2. January 10–February 21: Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne.



Self Portrait by Mary Beale, oil on mattress ticking. Her husband noted on July 13 1681, "The Picture of my Dearest Hearts owne upon ye Bedtickinge was painted over without oileing or varnish . . ." Mary Beale supported her husband and sons with her painting and as the cost of canvas rose in the 1680s she experimented with mattress ticking and onion bags.



Lady Kingsmill by Mary Beale, oil on canvas.

Oil on sacking
Bartholomew Beale.



Sir Basil Dixwell
Oil on canvas

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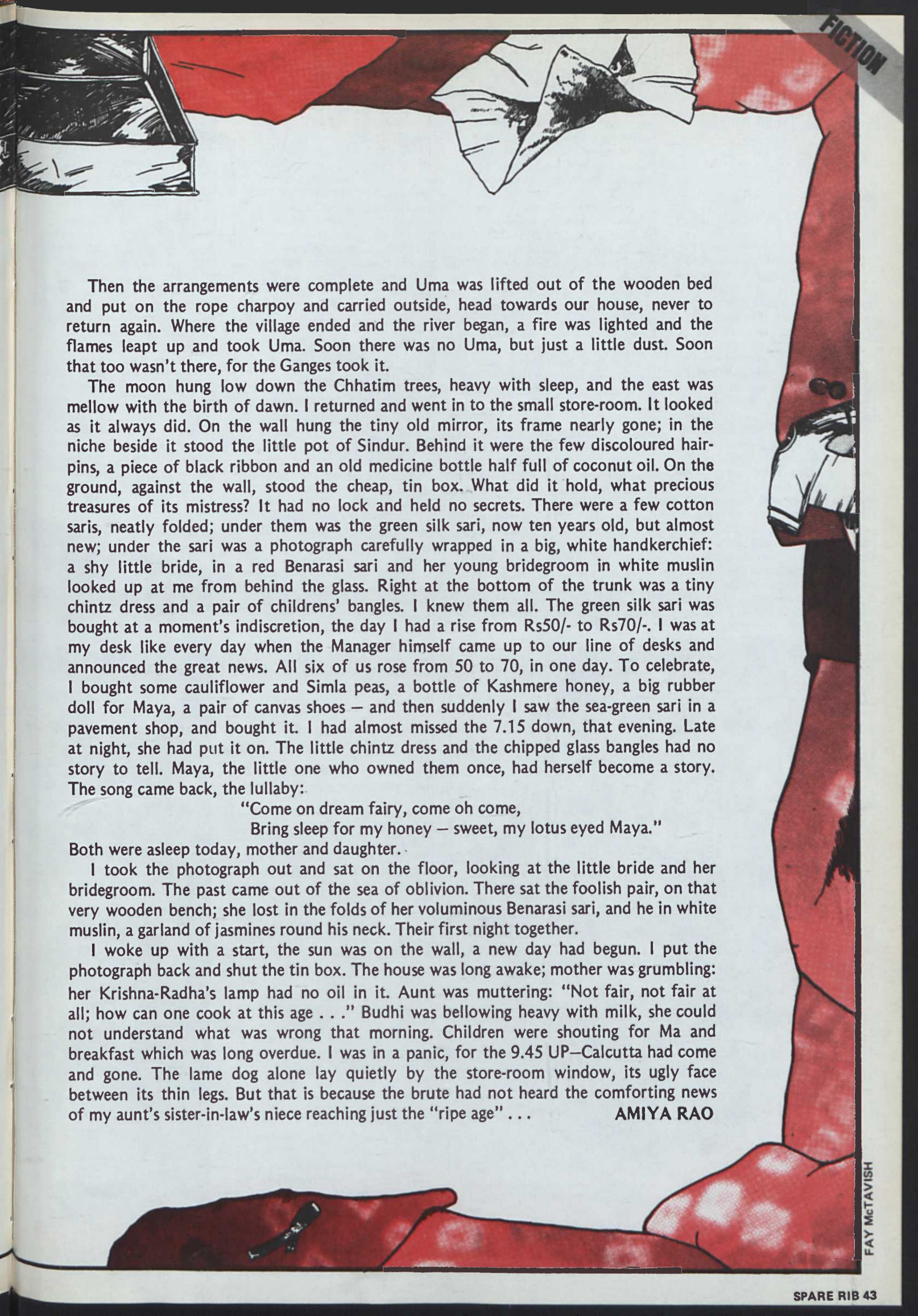
UNIQUE XMAS OFFER



DIED LAST NIGHT. As in life, so in death, she made no fuss. We knew she was not keeping good health, but then we also knew from the Vaid [doctor] whom we had called once, that there was nothing very special about her illness. It was the usual disease — whatever that may be — that females usually suffer from after repeated childbirths; and after all she was 26 and no longer young. We never bothered. I had my hot cup of tea at six in the morning, my hot lunch at nine sharp — for I had to catch the 9.45 U.P.—Calcutta train every day — my mother's Krishna-Radha [idols] had theirs at 12. My aunt's Puja utensils shone like gold, our cow Budhi and her calf were fed in time, children bathed and looked after and rooms swept and kept tidy. The daily routine was never upset; nor were we.

I was having my after-dinner game of chess — like every night at the Board's office — when our maidservant came to call me. "Bohudidi is ill, Mataji wants you." Mataji [mother] was my mother and Uma, after 12 long years of married life, was still the Bohudidi [sister]. I was in the middle of the most exciting game — my Queen was in trouble. I finished it and left for home. From the road, the little house looked completely normal, all wrapped up in sleep. The big moon was up, right on top of the house and the shadows of the Deodar fell long and black. There was not a sound, but no, wasn't that lame pet dog of Uma's whining somewhere? And there was one thing more rather unusual for this time of the night: the kerosene lantern was burning in the little store-room where Uma had lately taken to sleeping. When I came home, my mother and my aunt were out on the porch. Uma was already dead.

Then the friends were called and Uma was dolled up in her wedding sari. Mother quietly removed her two worn-out earrings and her single gold bangle, both her parents' gifts. Her feet and forehead were covered in red, auspicious Sindur [vermilion which all married women wear] and she was ready for the last lap of her journey. I went in to have a last look at her — or was it the first time I ever saw her! The tired, drawn face, now rested; the long lashes almost touching the upper cheek, the little dip in the chin, the thin short nose and the curve of the lips. Was it Uma — the girl I had married? I looked on fascinated. The lame dog moaned just outside the window; how did it know? Children slept on in another room. Someone laughed outside under the mango tree. Mother and aunt were consulting the priest about the auspiciousness or otherwise of the moment of her death. Somebody was chopping some wood; more people were coming; through the window they looked like so many legs and dangling lanterns. And someone entered the room; it was the Sarpanch [elected head of the village] whom I call uncle. He embraced me warmly and comforted me: "Don't worry son, she was the true Sati [legendary ideal wife]. She has served you well, given you sons, finished her allotted task on this earth and has gone to Heaven. But the house cannot remain empty for long. We shall soon get you another Lachmi [auspicious bride]." Mother and aunt grunted their approval and Uma slept on looking ridiculously young in her red Benarasi sari.



Then the arrangements were complete and Uma was lifted out of the wooden bed and put on the rope charpoy and carried outside, head towards our house, never to return again. Where the village ended and the river began, a fire was lighted and the flames leapt up and took Uma. Soon there was no Uma, but just a little dust. Soon that too wasn't there, for the Ganges took it.

The moon hung low down the Chhatim trees, heavy with sleep, and the east was mellow with the birth of dawn. I returned and went in to the small store-room. It looked as it always did. On the wall hung the tiny old mirror, its frame nearly gone; in the niche beside it stood the little pot of Sindur. Behind it were the few discoloured hair-pins, a piece of black ribbon and an old medicine bottle half full of coconut oil. On the ground, against the wall, stood the cheap, tin box. What did it hold, what precious treasures of its mistress? It had no lock and held no secrets. There were a few cotton saris, neatly folded; under them was the green silk sari, now ten years old, but almost new; under the sari was a photograph carefully wrapped in a big, white handkerchief: a shy little bride, in a red Benarasi sari and her young bridegroom in white muslin looked up at me from behind the glass. Right at the bottom of the trunk was a tiny chintz dress and a pair of childrens' bangles. I knew them all. The green silk sari was bought at a moment's indiscretion, the day I had a rise from Rs50/- to Rs70/-. I was at my desk like every day when the Manager himself came up to our line of desks and announced the great news. All six of us rose from 50 to 70, in one day. To celebrate, I bought some cauliflower and Simla peas, a bottle of Kashmere honey, a big rubber doll for Maya, a pair of canvas shoes — and then suddenly I saw the sea-green sari in a pavement shop, and bought it. I had almost missed the 7.15 down, that evening. Late at night, she had put it on. The little chintz dress and the chipped glass bangles had no story to tell. Maya, the little one who owned them once, had herself become a story. The song came back, the lullaby:

"Come on dream fairy, come oh come,
Bring sleep for my honey — sweet, my lotus eyed Maya."

Both were asleep today, mother and daughter.

I took the photograph out and sat on the floor, looking at the little bride and her bridegroom. The past came out of the sea of oblivion. There sat the foolish pair, on that very wooden bench; she lost in the folds of her voluminous Benarasi sari, and he in white muslin, a garland of jasmines round his neck. Their first night together.

I woke up with a start, the sun was on the wall, a new day had begun. I put the photograph back and shut the tin box. The house was long awake; mother was grumbling: her Krishna-Radha's lamp had no oil in it. Aunt was muttering: "Not fair, not fair at all; how can one cook at this age . . ." Budhi was bellowing heavy with milk, she could not understand what was wrong that morning. Children were shouting for Ma and breakfast which was long overdue. I was in a panic, for the 9.45 UP—Calcutta had come and gone. The lame dog alone lay quietly by the store-room window, its ugly face between its thin legs. But that is because the brute had not heard the comforting news of my aunt's sister-in-law's niece reaching just the "ripe age" . . .

AMIYA RAO

When the Bough Breaks

by Naomi Mitchison

(Bodley Head £2.25)

Parveen

by Anne Mehdevi

(Chatto & Windus £1.75)

Here are two novels which give the young reader a vivid introduction to women's long struggle for autonomy at different times and in different places and which echo today's concern with the role of women in modern society.

When the Bough Breaks is the title story of a collection of six stories by Naomi Mitchison dealing with life under the Roman Empire. Each story provides a view of Roman 'glory' as seen by its subjugated peoples – Etruscan, Goth and Gaul – for whom this 'glory' meant suffering and slavery. *When the Bough Breaks* – in fact a short novel – is the story of a young Finnish woman Gersemi who, dressed as a man, fights her way South as one of Alaric, the Goth, soldiers. She captures the wife of a Roman Governor and heads for Italy to claim the ransom. Becoming pregnant, she stays in Italy and now suffers the frustrations of life as a woman and mother in Roman society, unable

even to go alone to the Arena without being molested. The arrival of the Goths, whom she rejoins and the sacking of Rome means liberation for Gersemi as a soldier and as a woman.

Naomi Mitchison evokes time and place and the realities of social division while at the same time pointing a sensitive finger at the options open to women, whatever the culture, whether slave or free.

Parveen by Anne Mehdevi is the story of a young American girl born of a Persian father and American mother – now divorced. Parveen visits her father's estate in Persia for the first time and is thus initiated into the etiquette and customs that surround Persian women. The book is written as a journal, but the device falters as the plot progresses, leaving the reader with unanswered questions – what does Parveen's mother feel about her daughter's prolonged stay in Persia – and a very romantic ending. Set in the twenties, this story is based on the author's own experience and we get the feel of the feudal order, the Persian countryside, and especially a sympathetic but committed picture of the dignity of oppressed Persian women. In fact Parveen refuses to accept that "women were born to cry" and defends herself in her father's house

and fights on behalf of the village women.

Mehdevi's handling of the interplay of two cultures – Persian and American – is reminiscent of the novels of E.M. Forster, while Mitchison's *When the Bough Breaks* was originally published for adults in 1924. Both books are evidence of the closing in recent years of the divide between children's and adults' fiction. And both books can be recommended for either age group. □

Rosemary Stones

(Children's Rights Workshop)

Little Girls

by Elena Gianini Belotti

(Writers & Readers

Publishing Cooperative,

85p paperback)

Belotti's *Little Girls* sets out to explode the misconceived notion that sex roles are *natural* and she clearly demonstrates the various ways that teachers and parents alike *teach* little girls to behave like little girls. It doesn't happen spontaneously through some mysterious inner force. On the contrary, little girls (and boys) are actively channelled into rigid little boxes full of sex-stereotyped behaviour and Belotti's vivid anecdotes illustrate this very well. She herself has worked for many years with parents, teachers and young children and has much first-hand experience to draw on.

Parts of *Little Girls* seem a bit extreme – it was written in Italy and based on Italian culture where sex roles are even more tightly defined than here and where the male of the human species enjoys a particularly special status. However much of the book rings true and everyone who reads it will doubtless be able to recognise parts of their own childhood. Belotti takes us from babyhood through early childhood and on into nursery, primary and secondary school. Wherever we look we can see the little girls being taught to be good, well behaved and obedient – the perfect training for a submissive wife, low paid factory worker or dedicated nurse.

If any of these ideas sound familiar it's because they have nearly all been said before – perhaps not in Italy, but *Little Girls* certainly doesn't tread on undiscovered territory here. However it is true that these ideas have not circulated far enough and the Writers & Readers Publishing Cooperative is working hard to ensure a widespread distribution of this book to teachers and parents everywhere.

The idea that the behaviour of little girls and boys is largely conditioned from birth onwards by parents and teachers raises a number of important questions and it is a pity that Belotti doesn't discuss some of the implications of

her argument. If we know that sex roles are conditioned or taught then this means that it is possible to teach children differently. How would we like our children to be? Do we want little boys and little girls to be the same? What aspects of "femininity" and "masculinity", if any, do we want to keep? How would sexless children behave? Do children have a psychological need to know what sex they are? Belotti's *Little Girls* might have made more exciting reading if she had at least raised some of these questions. However, to hope for any answers would be expecting too much.

Finally, if our sex roles are determined by our parents and teachers, without giving us any say in the matter or any power to think about and change our own behaviour, then how come some of us managed to slip through the net? Perhaps the mechanisms are not quite as simple as Belotti suggests. □

Gill Pinkerton

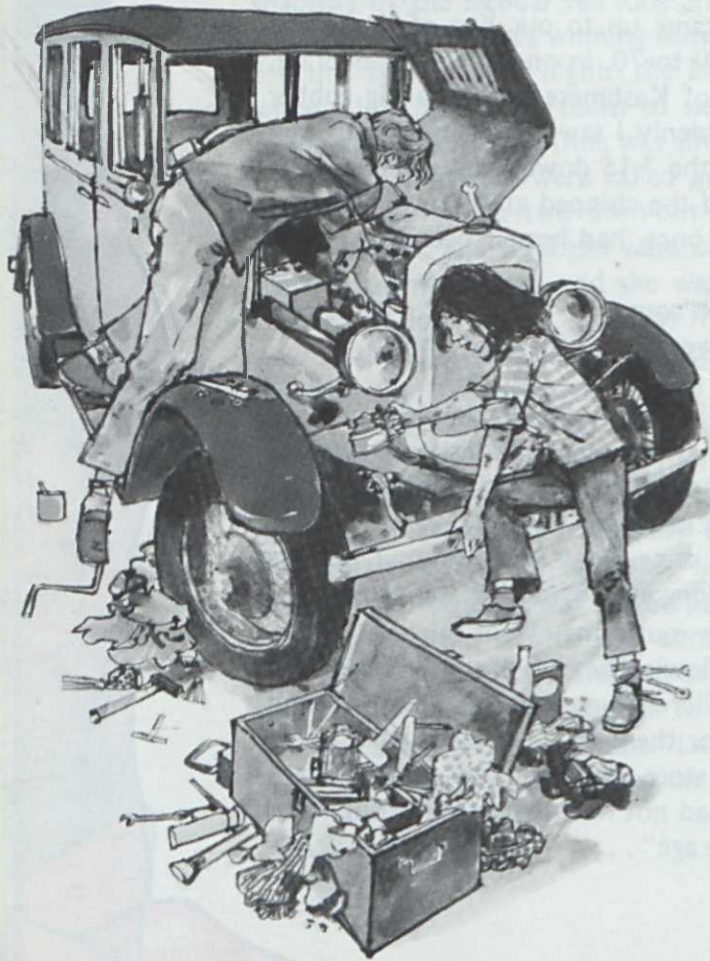


Illustration from *What Can I Do?* by Marjorie Darke illustrated by Barry Wilkinson. (Kestrel £1.10).

Alice looks for 'something to do' on a Saturday afternoon, and won't be fobbed off with dolls or cooking. Dad in the garden and Mum in the kitchen don't promise much but Alice finds joy in helping Mr Reed work on his old banger next door. □ CRW



The Lesbian Body by
Monique Wittig
(Peter Owen £3.25)

The Lesbian Body is a difficult book. It seems to me that only by a careful, detailed study can one forgive this and appreciate its value. It did increase my body-awareness, but it's worth adding that the combination of a terse, classical style and long lists of anatomical words makes it immediately daunting. It is not a gripping book, but it doesn't demand a continuous reading.

Wittig removes women from reality to an exclusively female environment on "Amazon Islands". She imagines a race of women who are not complementary to men, not passive receptacles, not limited by their biological functions. She rescues the body from the clean, static, impersonal, medical attitude, the mind/body dichotomy which confines anatomy to what can be described in terms of simple fact. The lesbian body is the autonomous female body: dynamic; responsive to its environment and so polymorphous; beautiful.

The book represents a vision of hope, a challenge: "... may you conceive yourself as I at last see you over the greatest possibly space..." It is about discovery. "I", a woman, is seeking her beloved throughout the book. The form is non-progressive — ie she never loses her and never finds her. She is encountered, destroyed, explored, but never achieved. The relationship represents the ideal quest for female identity, and (although the words are out of touch with Wittig's style) female solidarity. But the two lovers also represent the "stupid duality" within our everyday thought and its rigid categories. "Duality" describes in general the static concept of the "self" as an integral identity independent of the "other". It also describes the dislocation within the self, particularly within the self as female writer: the impossibility of unifying the part of oneself which necessarily depends on society as it is, and the part which, as a woman, recognises its lack of roots in cultural tradition.

Language, at present, is the expression of a male culture. Wittig points out that 'I' (Je) obliterates the fact that 'elle' or 'elles' are submerged in 'il' or 'ils', ie that all the feminine persons are complementary to the masculine persons. The 'I' (Je) who is writing is alien to her writing at every word because this 'I' (Je) uses a language alien to her... The nearest we can come to freedom is the consciousness of our limits; and for this reason Wittig introduces this awareness of her alienation from the writer's culture in which she works by symbolically dividing her pronouns — "j/e and m/e, 'I' and 'm/e'.

But it is not simply this negative understanding that Wittig has to

offer. Nor is *The Lesbian Body* a book about writing. "The body of the text subsumes all the words of the female body"; some (like in her last book *The Guerrillères*) in lists of random association, and some in the narrative of the text. Male associations are removed ("the tendon of Achillea") so that the female body becomes the norm. In spite of the quantity of clinical anatomy included, the book violently diverges from the clinical; it reappropriates the language of the body to a wider human context. It is the beloved that she lovingly dissects or tears apart, and usually the beloved is alive and responsive to the intrusion.

Clinical impersonality is a response to the fear of death. So, too, is body hatred, which is a rejection of anything that might suggest decay; so is objectification, which seeks to petrify — Wittig's image — the beloved in a permanent perfection. Instead of separating the body from death by simply, conventionally, emphasising the living, Wittig carries love into death, specifically in caressing her lover's skeleton while the sun shines through her ribs and she gazes eyeless at the sky. Conversely, the beloved leads her back from hell, quite obscenely decayed, redeemed from death by love.

The lesbian body is continually under the influence of its physical environment: "Your hair stiffened by the frost sparkles." There is a beautiful description of the sensations of being dissected in rain, a translucent creature through which the landscape shines. The women in the book randomly adopt a series of evolutionary shapes — monkey, protozoan, mud-created woman, fish. Whether these evolutionary forms and evolutionary myths are states of being or mental projections is deliberately ambiguous. Wittig is working from a non-rational perspective. By absorbing them into a mass of other non-rational metamorphoses and dreams, Wittig successfully creates an integrity of mental projection and physical process.

Myth and myth-creating are of great importance in *The Lesbian Body*. One of the myths is parthenogenesis, or self-birth; the myth of the goddess: *who has no beginning that she will not be*. She represents total power, absolute freedom of choice; she is the perfect vindication of the right to wish fulfilment and the right to hope. The gathering of anatomical knowledge, scattered members collected by the sea shore, is both discovery and recreation in the context of a real world of loss and fragmentation. And it plays out the myths of Deucalion and Pyrrha, who recreated the human race after the flood by throwing stones — the skeleton of mother earth — over their shoulders. Another image derived from myth, which is central to the book, is the scene in which lover and beloved as two sphinxes

confront and destroy each other ie mutually destroy the woman enigma which is their own ignorance of themselves.

I think it is worth saying something about the literary form that Wittig has chosen; partly because it makes an interesting comparison with *The Guerrillères*, and partly because I think its restrictions are self-imposed, deliberately chosen to point out the restrictions of our lives. I want to call *The Lesbian Body* a democratic epic. An epic is characteristically a celebration of the triumph of the individual over his environment. This book has an epic conception of proportions, and because it is the celebration of a quest and a struggle. But the quest has no end; the struggle is not for the defeat or possession of a hostile environment; and the self and the beloved, in so far as they are not each other's other halves, as it were, represent the mass of women.

The scale of the book comes, not from the unique strengths of one individual, but from celebrating the strength of women. In *The Guerrillères* Wittig retains the martial ideals of epic, wrongly, I think: no struggle is as glorious or as triumphant as that. To suggest it is to accept male values. In *The Lesbian Body*, however, the women are not soldiers, but fishers, lavender pickers, jute pickers. She is celebrating the endless patterns of the lives of women.

The problem inherent in her form is that there is a difference between the symbol which exists as a description of reality, or of conceivable reality, and the symbol which hovers uneasily in the mind, denied its real context by the reader's imagination. The huge strength, the divine and absolute power of women, ceases to exist in the world of men, except as

an ideal of female unity. The loving penetration of the female body, the carrying of emotion to its destructive limit, and the loving of the body in death and disintegration, make the reader aware of, and dissatisfied with, her real potential. They are images beyond achievement.

The lack of distinction in *The Lesbian Body* between the possible and the impossible makes for a curious clarity in ones own distinctions: the limits, the hope and the potential. I would like to finish with one of the least real of all the sequences, one of the most expressive of some playful kind of hope: "The kaleidoscope game consists of inserting a handful of yellow blue pink mauve orange green violet flies beneath someone's eyelids, m/in m/ine for instance. They are really tiny flies minute insects, their peculiarity lies in the bizarre intensity of their colours. You place them between m/y eyelid and m/y eyeball despite m/y protestations and laughter. As soon as m/y lids meet hermetically above and below they begin to fidget. The mauve one for instance progresses with extreme slowness, another one yellow let's say begins to describe zig-zags, another rotates on the spit, that one's orange, there's one that systematically traverses the interior of the periphery of m/y eye. I see the violet one hurl itself incessantly against the skin of m/y eyelid, a pink one gets caught up in a welling tear... It's impossible for m/e to retain them any longer. You collect them m/y beloved on a sheet of glass where m/y tears fall". □

Sophie Dick

Barbara Jean's carefully staged emotional return to Nashville.



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